


An
Agitator

Clementina
Black

Bliss
Sands and
Foster



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*It may perhaps save a little time and ink,
both to my reviewers and myself, if I say
plainly beforehand that these pages contain no
portrait of any person whatever.*

C. B.



AN
AGITATOR



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By

CLEMENTINA BLACK

AUTHOR OF "MISS FALKLAND," ETC.

Teach me to need no help from man,
That I may help such men as need.

LONDON

BLISS, SANDS AND FOSTER

15, CRAVEN STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1894

AN AGITATOR

I.

IT was the sixth week of that strike which Mudford—a little town of few events—still regards as one of the events of the century. A deputation of strikers had gone in to commune with the employing Company, while the President and the Secretary of the Trade Union sat paying strike allowances in the large room of the “Green Dragon.” The floor of the room was muddy; some score or so of wooden collecting-boxes were heaped untidily in a corner, and on a table hard by lay a paste-pot, a hammer, and a pile of handbills.

The table of payment stood at the end of the room, and behind the table sat the paymasters, with a volunteer helper who presided over the strike register. Richard Harris, the President of the Union, was a square, brown, capable-looking artisan some forty-two or forty-three years old. A certain measuring and balancing glance, a singular accuracy of move-

ment in the strong, square fingers, would have taught an experienced observer to guess that he was an engineer. Christopher Brand, the Secretary, was younger, slighter, taller, and a good deal darker as to hair and eyes. His was the thin, well-featured face of the civilized townsman—a face that may be seen in every collection of Englishmen, from the House of Lords to the prison yard. Nature makes this face quick, changeable, and expressive, and leaves its owner to give it a stamp. In Brand's case long self-control had taught it to be impassive, and habitual moods had left it melancholy, and a little contemptuous. The volunteer, who was probably the youngest of the three, was a lady, Mrs. Oliver Pelham—the Honourable Mrs. Pelham—wife of the curate of Mudford.

A lad had come up to the table, and only one more recipient—a woman—remained to follow him, although there were still some seven or eight piles of money on the table.

Brand glanced across at the range of empty benches, and took a card rather wearily from the lad's hand.

"Jim Brown, number 128, please, Mrs. Pelham. Sign your name, Jim, and Harris will give you your money."

Jim signed slowly, with a sympathetic action of the tongue, while Mrs. Pelham made the

proper entry in the strike register before her. A man, carrying a collection-box slung round him, came in, took it off, and jingling the coppers within it, laid it with the rest, and sat down to await his turn. Jim Brown having completed his autograph, passed across, and had seven and sixpence counted out to him. He re-counted it slowly at Harris's request, and went out of the room.

Now came the woman. She was a little excited and tremulous; she had not the stolid air of certainty which generally marks the recipient of a fixed allowance.

"Who is it?" asked Brand.

"Please, sir, Mick Doolan. He's at home, ill."

Harris looked up sharply.

"Hullo, missis," said he. "That won't do. Mick's been in at work two days this week. Him and Jake Smith had a bit of a row about it—out here in front—on Wednesday night. If he's at home ill, it's the black eye Jake gave him that's the matter with him, and serve him right, I say. No pay for blacklegs here, missis."

"Well, if he did go in," said Mrs. Doolan, speaking several notes higher in the scale, and with a great increase of rapidity, "he come out ag'in; and what is a man to do, with the landlord pressin' for the rint, and the blessed

childer cryin' for bread? I ask you, Mr. Brand, sir, what is a man to do? And he come out ag'in. And then to be knocked about by a brute like that Smith, and not to get his strike pay, and him paid into the Union reg'lar."

"I don't know so much about that," said Brand. "Show me his card. I thought so. Six weeks in arrear when the strike began. I'm sorry for *you*, Mrs. Doolan; but we can't give strike pay to a man that has gone in and worked as a blackleg. And, you know, he didn't come out of his own free will."

"He was intimidated, sir; and if he don't get his pay, he'll summons that Jake Smith, that he will. He'll have the law of him, he will."

"I don't say he wasn't intimidated," said Brand. "It don't take much to intimidate Mike Doolan; but you know, Mrs. Doolan, it wasn't because he was intimidated that he came out. It was because he went to work the lift drunk, and Sampson caught him at it. Scratch out his name, Mrs. Pelham."

Mrs. Doolan, rising into quite another octave, declared that it was a shame and a cheat getting decent men out of work, and then never giving them a penny, that the Union ought to be shown up, that the leaders took good care to

get paid themselves, and didn't care whether the men starved. Finally she tore the Union card into several pieces, which she flung at them, accompanied by a highly elaborate curse on the day when her Mick first set eyes on it. Then she withdrew, a good deal to the surprise and to the very perceptible relief of the three paymasters. Probably she had never expected to succeed in her demand.

"Next, please," said Brand, and as the "next" came up, he added to Mrs. Pelham, "Bob Sharman."

"Number 35, please, ma'am," said Sharman. He signed in a business-like and comparatively expeditious manner, remarking: "They're a bad lot, them Doolans. He drunk his last week's pay afore Saturday night, and boasted as he'd go in ag'in o' Monday. Wish he'd broke his bloody neck down that 'ere lift."

"So do I, Bob," replied Harris, "but it never is the blackguards as breaks their necks. Ten bob; count it, and don't say as I cheated you."

Sharman stood, weighing the money in his hand. "Well now, guv'nor, what do you think? How's this thing going?" he asked confidentially.

"Can't say, Sharman," answered Brand. "The deputation have been in, talking to the Directors, for an hour-and-a-half. That looks like a settlement."

"I'm not one of them," resumed Sharman, "as likes to croak. I'll stand out as long as there's another man to stand by me. But it do dishearten men to go on, week after week, and to see them getting in the blacklegs, now one, now two. There's nigh on thirty in, altogether, and that's the gospel truth, though I keep on saying there's no mor'n a dozen. I doubt there'll be a good few of our chaps ready to go in o' Monday morning. They're that weak-kneed. What I say is, You make terms, Kit, while you can get 'em." Returning to the practical, he inspected the coins in his hand, remarked cheerfully, "Ten bob it is, mate," and departed.

"How many more, Dick?" asked Brand. His voice, now that the three were alone, showed extreme weariness.

"One, two, three—six," answered Harris.

"Does that mean six blacklegs?"

"Oh, they are only late. Lord, I wish this deputation would be quick! Here's the *Mudford Express* again. Hang him."

A very young and very dapper representative of the Fourth Estate entered.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Brand; any news yet?" he chirped.

"No," said Brand, officially wooden once more. "There's a deputation with the

Directors. We shall probably be able to give you the result after the meeting."

"And what time will the meeting be?"

"Depends upon what time the deputation come out."

"And the terms now? Can't you give me any idea what the terms are likely to be?"

"No, no, Mr. Jackson," said Brand, smiling a little. "Do you think I am going to give the *Mudford Express* the chance of showing that I made a bad shot? And if I was right, you know, you would only give me credit for knowing beforehand. Look in again, later."

"Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Brand," responded the cheerful Jackson, and crossed to the other side of the table.

"Money coming in pretty well, Mr. Harris?"

"We've paid everybody up to the present," said Harris, "and I don't doubt we shall go on doing so; there's a shot or two in the locker yet."

"Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Harris," said the young gentleman, and so departed.

Brand thrust out his legs, pushed his hands deep into his jacket pockets, leaned his shoulders against the back of his chair, and closed his eyes.

"Mr. Harris," asked Mrs. Pelham softly,

"when did either of you last have something to eat?"

Harris replied that he had had "a bit" about two o'clock, his "missis" having brought it from home, tracked him from place to place, and finally faced him, food in hand, and commanded him to eat, but that he did not know when Kit had had anything.

"Well, I shall go and ask for some tea," said Mrs. Pelham, and went away accordingly.

"Pretty nigh done up, Kit," said Harris gently to his comrade.

"No," said Brand, without moving. "It's the fortune of war; you can't win a battle with a cowardly army. They are a weak-kneed lot, as Bob says."

"What can you expect of a lot of unskilled labourers in a one-eyed place like Mudford? and there's good stuff too."

"Yes, there's some," assented Brand.

"What sort of an offer do you really expect from the Directors?" resumed Harris.

"Humble pie."

"And you'll eat it?"

Brand shook his head.

"The men will."

"Yes," said Brand, and there was a pause. After a minute he said, "I shall get the sack on this job; I know that well enough. It would not be now, but by-and-by they would

make the occasion, and the men would not come out again, not if I asked them—and I wouldn't. I shall be beforehand with them, and go."

"London?"

"Yes, London. I should have gone before, except for the Union. It did not seem fair to leave them until they could run alone. I can't do any more good to them, and I am free to go. I've got no ties now."

Mrs. Pelham returned, bringing a tray with tea and bread and butter. She poured out a cupful, administering milk and sugar with the precision of one who knew her client's preferences, and in a tone of cheerful despotism, bade Brand drink. He took the cup with a softened and grateful countenance, and put out his hand for bread and butter; but Mrs. Pelham stopped him, reminding him that he had been counting coppers, and he went obediently to wash. Harris, who had taken no part in the counting of pennies, was permitted to eat.

"He do look ill, ma'am, don't he?" said Harris.

"He does indeed," answered Mrs. Pelham.

"I don't believe he has had two nights' sleep since this affair began. It's so bad, having nobody to look after him. A working man's nowhere without his wife."

"I never saw her, said Mrs. Pelham. "She died just before we came here."

"She was a sweet-looking creature, poor Molly," said Harris with a sigh, "and fair wrapped up in Kit; but she never had no health, and the worry and the trouble wore her out."

"Surely you don't mean that he wasn't careful and considerate?"

"Indeed, and he was, so far as he knew how. But he is wearing, is Kit, even to a shopmate. There's no knowing what he'll do next. If he's got the sack once, he has got it half a dozen times. Never no fault of work, you know. First-rate workman is Kit; but he will speak his mind in the shop and out of the shop. Over to Cinderbridge, where we worked together first, he was in five different shops, and at last they boycotted him right through the town. We got up a Socialist Branch, him and me, and Kit headed a deputation to the Town Council about the unemployed. My word, he did speak! There was no work for him in any Cinderbridge shop after that. It was that bitter winter three years ago, and they fair starved. He tramped miles. Luckily I was in work, and poor Molly stayed with us. How that poor girl did fret! Then he got work over here to this wire-working company, and when they had been here three months the baby was born, and Molly she just pined away, and there they lie, the two of them."

The door opened and Mrs. Pelham's husband, the curate of Mudford, came in. The husband and wife were not unlike, well grown and regular featured, with fresh complexion and clear eyes, that looked out on the world with an unmistakable air of kindness and sincerity.

"Finished paying out, Nanny? Where's Brand?" asked the young clergyman.

His wife explained that Brand was washing away the contamination of copper coinage, and Brand himself appeared a moment later and bestowed on the newcomer a particularly cordial smile, and a welcoming grasp from a cold-water chilled hand. Mrs. Pelham immediately poured out more tea, and proffered bread and butter.

A heavily-built young workman slouched in with a lounging, lurching gait, and said, "Come for my strike pay, please."

"Now you know, Tom Williams," protested Harris, "this strike has been going on six weeks. Don't you know by this time that Fridays, half past two to half past four, is pay-time? They'd fine you in the shop, you know, if you came in twenty minutes late."

Williams attempted no retort, and Mrs. Pelham hastened to ask in friendly tones, "What number, Mr. Williams?"

He gave his number; she made her entry

and handed to him ten shillings, and the receipt book to sign. He took the money, but declined the book, alleging that he was "no scollard," and she officiated as his scribe.

After this came a little lull. Brand stretched himself on a form at the end of the room, and there lay with his eyes closed. Harris continued to eat his way methodically through the pile of bread and butter.

"Nanny," said Oliver Pelham softly, "I'm going to get into a row about this strike."

His wife looked at him with enquiring eyes.

"Dr. Carbottle writes me such a sermon from Nice. Thought a man of my family might have been trusted not to mix myself up in a low agitation, and drag the Church through the mud. Wants me to go and apologise to the Directors, and says he shall regard it as a breach of trust if I take any further part in the strike till he comes home. So I expect the the end of it will be that you and I will have to pack up our traps."

"What's that, Mr. Pelham? You going away?" said Harris.

"My vicar doesn't approve of democratic curates," said Pelham.

Harris disdainfully pronounced the Reverend Doctor "an old fossil," and explained that as a rule he "did not take much stock" in parsons,

but that he should make a practice of church attendance, "just to show my good will," if all were of the pattern of Mr. Pelham.

Pelham, lowering his voice, asked, "What will Brand do when this is over? Will he stay?"

"Not he," said Harris.

"And you, Harris?"

"Not me," said Harris.

"And you, Oliver?" said Mrs. Pelham with a little smile.

"Not I," said Oliver.

The long-absent deputation, consisting of three delegates, now appeared. Brand sprang up and said alertly, "Call in the rest of the committee, Dick. I expect they are in the bar."

"Well, you needn't have said so, mate, if they are," said one of the delegates.

Harris, thoughtfully carrying with him the tea-tray, went out, and returned in company with three members of the strike committee, one of whom was wiping his hand across his mouth.

The men sat down at the table—Harris, as chairman, occupying the central place behind the inkstand. Mr. Pelham, for himself and his wife, asked whether they might be permitted to stay. Burton, the delegate who had expostulated with Brand, at once moved a resolution

to that effect, which was duly seconded and immediately carried.

Harris had risen to his feet, and was about to open the proceedings, when a very small girl, carrying a very large basket, burst into the room, crying breathlessly, "Please, I want father's strike money."

"Now look here, my girl, don't you know you are too late?" said Harris.

"Oh, if you please, sir, I did not know what time it was, and they did keep me so at the shop, and father will be so mad."

"Show me your father's card," said Harris. "William Lewis, number 189. Married, of course. Ten shillings. Here, sign your father's name, missy. Hold out your hand. Half-a-crown and six is three, four, five, six, seven, ten. Run along, my girl."

She ran along, and Brand locked the door to keep out further interruptions.

II.

HARRIS proceeded to narrate at some length the history of the deputation's mission, and of the objections made by the Directors to receiving either the President of the Union—himself—or the Secretary, Brand—because, though they were employed by the Company, they were not wire-workers but engineers—"belong to the Amalgamated Society, both of us, and proud to do so." Brand and himself, he explained, were not the men to stand on ceremony in that way, and so Brothers Hammond, Burton, and Wilkins had been chosen as delegates, and were now here to give the result of their interview. "Brother Hammond, will you speak?"

Hammond began: "Well, we went in, and there was Mr. Bayne and Mr. Lee, and all of 'em. And there was the London papers on the table. Mr. Lee had on his gold eye-glasses, and he had just been reading the *Trumpeter*."

A murmur of satisfaction arose from the committee, every man being well aware that the *Trumpeter* contained a paragraph of which

the material had been supplied by Mr. Pelham, and in which the lower pay and longer hours of the Mudford wire-workers were contrasted with those of other workers in the trade.

“So we asked them to lay their terms before us, and Mr. Bayne read out from a paper, and said the first condition was that we should give up the Union. So then I stood up and I took my hat and I says, ‘In that case, gentlemen, we may as well say good morning; for we’ll starve sooner, and that’s all about it!’ ‘Sit down, sit down,’ says Mr. Lee, ‘don’t you be so hasty.’ And then it seemed they wasn’t going to push it. It was just a bit of bluff to see whether we’d do it. And Mr. Akers made a speech, and said how we’d been misled, and they had no ill-feeling against us——”

“I daresay!” interjected a committeeman derisively.

“And they could get as many men as ever they wanted, only they didn’t want to be hard on their old men——”

“Likely tale!” again interrupted the contemptuous member.

“And there had always been so much good feeling, and things had always been so pleasant until certain firebrands got among us, and he hoped it would be so again. So then I up and I said, ‘Mr. Akers, sir, things may ha’ been pleasant on your side—we can’t say about that

—but they haven't been pleasant on ours, and there hasn't been no good feeling on the men's part these three years and better, to my certain knowledge; and if it's Kit Brand you are meaning by firebrands,' I says, 'there was unpleasantness enough before ever he come to the place.' I let 'em have it straight, didn't I, Tom?"

"Ah! you did, Bill, no mistake," replied Burton.

"And I said to 'em, 'If you don't like our secretary, we don't like your foreman. And if you hadn't put in a bullying chap like that, perhaps we should not have ever thought of forming a Union to protect ourselves. But the real point,' I says, 'is the question of hours. That's what we come out upon. Here are we working twelve hours a day, and we think it's too long. Other men in the trade don't work so long in other places. Your own engineers only work nine, and why should we work twelve, and less wages too?'"

"That's the way to talk to 'em, mate," said an approving hearer.

"Well then," proceeded Hammond, "we got to it, and we argified up and down; and the upshot of it all was, they'd give in to the ten hours if we'd take sixpence a week less, and they'd give us the eleven at the same pay as now if so be we could agree about the other points.

So we said we'd lay it before the meeting, and let them know. And then we come to the point about the Union, and Kit and Dick—but it's Kit they are so mad against. They said they couldn't and they wouldn't have no outsiders to the trade—and you come in for some pretty sharp raps too, Mr. Pelham. Well, then old Joe here, he cuts in, and he says, 'Look here, gentlemen, we say what we do out of work hours ain't no affair o' yourn. We makes a Union if we likes, and we 'lects who we chooses for secretary, and so we mean to.' Let me see—what else did you say to 'em, Joe?"

Wilkins rose with solemnity. He was considerably the eldest of the group, a small man with a narrow, ferret face, and with the appearance and manner which police-court reporters call respectable. He looked rather like a shop-keeper than an artisan, and his delivery recalled the Dissenting pulpit.

"I says, 'Tit for tat, gentlemen,' I says, 'You've got no right to turn out our seckertary, and we've got no right to turn out your foreman; but if so be you'll consider of the one, we'll consider of the other.' And there sat Sampson all the while, looking as black as thunder. And I thinks to myself, thinks I, 'You've done for yourself this time, Joe Wilkins, if that man stays.'"

He drew a long breath, and took up an attitude which was well known to his hearers as a prelude to a long oration. Burton, answering a look from Harris, hastily interposed—

“And so the end of it was they said they’d give up their man if we’d give up ours, and we said we’d lay it before the meeting.”

“And that’s the whole of it, mates, is it?” said Harris, carefully avoiding the eye of Wilkins, who thereupon sat down with an air of resigned but regretful protest.

“Yes, that’s about it,” said Hammond.

“Well, comrades,” said Harris, “you have heard the report of the delegates. It is now for you to consider whether we as a committee should advise the men to accept those terms.”

“Oh!” interposed Burton, recollecting, “they said they didn’t so much mind about Harris if we’d give up Brand.”

“Much obliged to ’em,” said Harris, reddening. “I suppose they think there’s no fight in me. Any brother want to say anything on this question or move any resolution?”

It appeared that every brother wished to say something; but the observations of the first few speakers were more remarkable for length than for relevance. Presently, however, a committeeman of a less fluent temper arose and spoke thus: “Well, mates, I should like to say this ’ere: Kit Brand he’s been a good secre-

tary to us ; I don't say different ; but is it worth while to stand out any longer just for him ? I put it to you, mates, and no unkindness meant—is it worth while ?”

“Hear, hear!” cried several voices ; and Brand's neighbour said apologetically, “You see where it pinches, Kit, is the missis and the kids. It comes hard on a man with a family. You don't feel it so much. You haven't got nobody belonging to you.”

“Oh, how could he say that?” murmured Mrs. Pelham to her husband.

These two, sitting at the farther table, were busy opening collection boxes, counting their contents, and rolling up in brown paper little columns of five shillings' value.

Wilkins now again rose, and in many words expressed his opinion that the terms ought to be accepted. “We can't expect,” said this judicious man, “to have it all our own way, and I do understand that they should feel they can't stand Brand. You know it can't be denied there has been violent things said. Of course our young friend here has worked hard—no man harder—but we can't look for him to have the same experience and moderation as what older men have, and what he will have some day himself, if he's spared. And what I say is that we've got the most of what we want, and now we want a quiet life.”

"Well, I second that," said Burton. "I don't altogether hold with Joe about Kit's being violent, for I don't think he has been more violent than what he had a right to be; but I do say, plain, directors or no directors, that the wire-workers want a wire-worker for secretary, and not an engineer—even if he came down from heaven o' purpose."

"Hear! hear!" cried several voices.

"Perhaps," said Harris, "our Secretary would like to say a few words before I put the resolution."

He looked with a deprecating, kindly, encouraging air at Brand.

Brand rose and said, with his tone of rather ostentatious indifference—the tone which the Pelhams knew to be the cloak of an inner bitterness: "Well, Chairman and friends, I don't know that there's much for me to say. It's your affair, and it's for you to decide. I've tried to do what I could for you to the best of my power, and I'm sorry it isn't more. I did it because I thought it ought to be done, and not to please you. I am satisfied to have done it, and I don't complain that I have not succeeded in pleasing you better. I don't feel any ill feeling about it: I have seen too much of these things for that, and it isn't in any temper or anything of that sort that I say what I do say, and that is, that my mind was made up

before ever I heard the report of this deputation, to go away as soon as the strike was over. And so I beg to give in my resignation of the Secretaryship of the Mudford Wireworkers Union, to which you elected me two years and a half ago."

He sat down, and that committeeman with whom the attractions of the bar had been most potent, exclaimed, "Good old Kit!"

The others sat silent, in the resentful discomfort of men who have been made to feel their conduct unhandsome.

"Any other member anything to say?" asked Harris; and Wilkins added a reminder that the members of the Union were waiting, and that it was a pity to waste time.

It appeared that there was no other speaker.

Harris put the resolution, and every man's hand went up except Brand's.

"On the contrary? None. I declare the resolution carried."

He stood up, and the Strike Committee, headed by Wilkins, began to move towards the door.

"Never you mind, Kit," said Hammond to Brand. "When they have had another secretary for six months they'll be saying there never was such a secretary as you."

"Do you suppose I care about that?" answered Brand. "What I mind is that they

will put in that old humbug Wilkins, and he'll let the whole Union tail off into nothing."

"Don't you believe it," returned Hammond. "We aren't going to see that old duffer secretary. We know a trick worth two of that."

"I suppose he means that he wants to be secretary himself," murmured Mrs. Pelham to her husband. He in his turn followed the others, and she remained alone in the committee-room methodically counting pennies.

III.

MRS. PELHAM was still alone in the Committee-room, some ten minutes later, and still engaged in counting money, and in rolling up packets of sixty pennies, when someone knocked at the door, and an elderly man, who looked like a superior mechanic, appeared in the doorway.

"I want to see Christopher Brand, please," said he.

"He is at a meeting outside just now. Can I take any message? Is it anything about the Union?"

"No; it isn't about the Union," he replied slowly. And after a moment he added, "My name's Brand. I've come from Northampton to see him."

"Oh, are you his father?" cried Mrs. Pelham with a face of welcome. "Please come in."

He came in and sat down, and she went on—

"I expect they will settle to close the strike at this meeting, and then I am afraid Mr. Brand will feel the strain of all the work and anxiety, especially as the directors make

it a condition that he shall not remain secretary of the Union."

"And won't the men stand to Kit?" asked the elder Brand.

"I don't think he would let them in any case," she answered.

The two looked at each other. She remarked that Christopher Brand's father was a man of larger build but not so tall; fairer and ruddier of complexion, and that he had a kindly, sagacious face.

"You'll be Mrs. Pelham, I reckon?" said he, and on receiving her "Yes," added, "I've heard of you and your husband from Kit."

Sounds of applause, and cries of "Bravo, Brand!" "Well done, Kit!" came in from outside, and a minute later Brand himself came in looking excessively pale, walking slowly, and leaning on Pelham.

"Oh, Oliver!" cried his wife, starting forward, "what has happened?"

"It's nothing. He turned faint in the crowd, and no wonder."

He placed his patient in a chair; Mrs. Pelham threw open a window and brought a glass of water.

After a minute Brand opened his eyes and remarked, in rather a thin voice, "Well, I suppose that was pretty near. Never felt so queer in all my life."

"Kit," said his father.

"Why, father!" said Brand, and made an effort to sit upright. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"No, Kit, no. Wanted to see you about a little matter of business, that's all. But what have you been doing to make yourself look like this?"

"Leading a six weeks' strike, Mr. Brand, and going without proper meals and rest," replied Pelham.

Then Mrs. Pelham, perceiving that Brand, though still very pale, seemed pretty well recovered, said that she and her husband would leave them alone for the few minutes of quiet now available—"only mind, Mr. Brand, you mustn't go away and leave all that money lying about."

"Well, father," said the young man. "What is it? I am sure it must be something serious to bring you all this way."

"Well, it is," said the senior, and laid an opened letter before him. It was addressed to *Mrs. James Brand*. Kit looked at it in gloomy silence.

"Well, I wondered who it could be that knew her to write to, and didn't know she was dead all these years. And so of course I opened it and read it. It doesn't belong to me, but to you. It's about you, Kit. It's from your father."

Kit pushed the letter from him, and after a minute said, "I don't want to know anything about him. He has never troubled himself about me all these years."

"Nay, nay, lad, don't be hasty. Think of yourself. You are a clever chap, you know, Kit, and you have got plenty of ambition, and a will and a temper of your own. You're not fit for a working man; you're too masterful. Ah, and you're too dainty too. You have got different ways, and, mind you, the men feel it. That's what is wrong with your men here. They feel you different."

"Perhaps you are right," said Brand. "They know nothing about all this, and yet they call me 'the aristocrat.'"

"Well, now here's your chance. It may mean money and power and influence. And it's your own, justly your own. I can't think of the man without anger—no, not after all these years—but you ought, because after all he's your father. God knows I don't want to lose you, Kit. You have been as dear to me as my own—dearer in one way, for you are like her, and they favour me. But right is right, and you have a right to this."

He laid the letter before him once more.

"Father," said Kit—and it was a very different voice from that the committee had

heard—"I wonder whether you know how much, much rather I would have been your son."

"Ay, Kit," returned his stepfather; "but, you know, a son of mine would never have been just what you are. Take things as they stand, Kit, and face them out. Your father was a gentleman and a scoundrel. He has left you half a gentleman, and nothing of the other."

"And never a name of my own," said Kit.

"He offers you a chance, now, to make one. Read the letter, Kit. Read the letter and be fair."

The young man took the letter and read it, and the look of displeasure deepened on his face.

"He doesn't even sign it. Wants me to go and see his lawyers, and he'll provide for me. Says he has heard of me. Why how has he heard of me?"

"This strike, maybe."

"What's his name, father? You never told me."

"I don't know, my lad. I only know it wasn't what he called himself."

"I don't know what to do," said Brand. "Coming just now, when I have got to go away and start fresh."

And here the few minutes of quiet came to

an end. Harris, Wilkins, and two or three of the others returned, and the Pelhams followed a minute later. Brand stood up hastily, thrusting the letter into his breast pocket. The envelope fell unheeded to the floor.

"Well, Kit," said Harris, "the meeting's over, and—why, Mr. Brand, this is a surprise!" He shook hands heartily with James Brand, and Wilkins took up the sentence.

"And the terms accepted, and a vote of thanks passed to you for all your good intentions."

"And for being so ready to stand aside for the good of the others," added Burton.

"They are so sure it is for their good, are they?" said Kit. "Well, men, I would have stood by you to the end if you had wanted me, but it seems I can serve you best by going away. Perhaps it happens best for me too. Will the committee meet at ten sharp to-morrow, please?"

The committee felt itself chilled and dismissed. Hammond and Wilkins lingered. Hammond shook hands with Brand, assuring him that the Union should not be suffered to go to pieces, but he gained no smile of response.

Mrs. Pelham, with instinctive orderliness, picked up from the floor the envelope that lay there, and held it to the light to make sure,

before throwing it aside, that it contained no enclosure. As she did so, she saw the address.

"Why—Oliver," said she.

"What is it?" asked her husband, startled by her tone, and took the envelope from her.

"It is Uncle Warwick's writing," said she.

He looked down at it with a grave face.

"Well, it isn't our business, any way," he said, after a moment.

"No," replied his wife, and she carried away the envelope to a heap of waste paper lying in a corner.

Wilkins meanwhile had drawn near to Brand, who stood looking down at the fire.

"Now, you take my advice, Brand; you just go away to a quiet place and take things easy. This has been rather too big a job for anybody as hasn't had experience. What you want to do is to lie quiet a little, and not try to be hurrying on the British working man."

"I think I *will* take your advice, Wilkins," said Brand, with a smile that rather perplexed that judicious man, and caused him to go away in silence.

Harris, now enquiring whether there was anything pressing to do, and being assured that there was not, proposed to take James Brand back to Mrs. Harris, and to deliver a report to the *Mudford Express* in passing.

When they had left, Brand remained standing moodily by the fireplace, one foot on the fender, and his eyes upon the letter, which he had again drawn forth and unfolded. Pelham and his wife came and stood opposite.

"So you are going, Brand?" said the curate.

"Yes ; I'm going," said Brand.

"I am glad of it," returned Pelham, "for you are wasted here. Do you know that you are the one man I envy?"

"Me?" said Brand, looking up.

"I do, and I'll tell you why. I believe that there's one great work to be done for our whole nation to-day—the work of bettering the conditions for working men and women. You believe that too?"

"I do," said Brand.

"Here are you and I," continued Pelham, "about the same age, with the same aims and hopes. We both know that the real movement must come from the people themselves, and that to put our faith into them is the first step. Which of us can do that? Not I, because I stand outside. I have never toiled with my hands, never tramped in search of work, never known what it was to come to my last shilling. My thoughts, my words, my way of seeing things are all just a little different—and they distrust me. I don't feel any barrier, but they do. Not you—I know you don't. I tell you,

Brand, if I could only—feeling as I do, and seeing as I do—put off my birth and education, and all the things we call advantages, and stand as you do, one of themselves, I would do it and be thankful.”

His wife, as she stood beside him, gave a little nod of agreement. Brand stood silent, looking at their two faces with something like wonder.

“And you do stand there,” Pelham went on; “and moreover you have the very rare gifts that make a leader. If I had them—and I haven’t—I never could do what you can. It is a great thing to have the chance that you have, and to be worthy of it.”

“Ah! to be worthy of it,” said Brand in a low tone.

“As for me—as for us—the best that we can do is to help and to follow, and we know it. And now, Brand, another and more trivial matter. Would you help me if I came to you for help?”

“You know I would,” said Brand.

Mrs. Pelham, divining her husband’s drift, gently withdrew and went to the table.

“And there’s no man I would come to more readily,” pursued the curate. “I want you to do the same for me. I know you have taken no strike allowance all these weeks, and that you are not getting anything from your

own society. Let me lend you something to pay up debts here, and give you time to look about you when you get to London."

Brand stood silent, looking down at the letter in his hand.

"Won't you, Brand? I'd take it gladly from you."

Brand slowly tore the letter across, and dropped the pieces into the fire.

"I'll take it, Mr. Pelham," said he, "and thank you. You don't know quite all you have done for me these ten minutes. The devil came to me, in the shape of that bit of burning paper, and tempted me to be false to my class, and take wealth and ease instead. While you were envying me my chance, I, like a coward, was thinking of casting it away, for a lot in life more like yours. I'll never do it again. There go the last sparks!"

He turned from the fireplace and went on, almost with cheerfulness: "And now let us turn to and count up our last strike pennies, and make up our day's accounts."

IV.

THE Russell Square Socialist Society was about to give a really brilliant entertainment. A big hall had been taken, and the society's motto, *Festina lente*, blazoned in green on scarlet, stretched from end to end of the wall behind the platform. A narrow, curtained archway on one side communicated with an ante-room, and at about half-past seven this curtain was drawn aside, and the society's newly-elected honorary secretary, Mr. Walter Dimsdale, advanced upon the untenanted platform. He was not in evening dress, for the Russell Square Socialists looked askance upon dress coats and white ties as badges of an effete aristocratic system. He was, however, decorated not only with a red tie, but with a red rosette of considerable dimensions. In his hand he carried a paper of notes, from which he methodically ticked off item after item, murmuring to himself as he did so—

“Agenda for chairman. Inkstand, full—very much so. Pen for myself.” He inspected the assortment of penholders, and took to him-

self the most eligible. "Water bottle and glass. All right. Rosettes for committee."

He retreated to the inner room, where these adornments were lying in readiness, and there found Mr. O'Halloran of the society's committee seated at the table, reading over and correcting (with Dimsdale's carefully pointed secretarial pencil) a small manuscript written on thin and crackling paper. Having finished his emendations, he helped himself to a rosette from the open cardboard box in the Secretary's hand, and invited him to listen to his article for the morrow's *Meteor*. Dimsdale—a meek man, and not yet practised in the autocratic methods of the really efficient honorary secretary—submitted, with only a faint suggestion that time was short, and that the rest of the committee might arrive at any moment.

O'Halloran threw himself back in his chair, flung open his brown-checked coat, displaying a copious expanse of waistcoat and a tie of variegated design and vivid colours, and began to read :

“*The Hero of the Hour. Kit Brand and the Russell Square Socialist Society.* Christopher Brand, the most popular man in England, was born some thirty years ago, of poor but respectable parents, in a suburb of Manchester, and imbibed in a Board School of the great metro-

polis of cotton the rudiments of that education which has stood him in such good stead. Many touching anecdotes are narrated of his juvenile precocity and daring. At fourteen he was apprenticed ——’”

“But where are the touching anecdotes?” interrupted the disappointed listener.

“Never heard one in my life,” replied the journalist. “But it sounds well, and it’s all right, because if there aren’t any yet, they are certain to be manufactured. The next bit’s a little dull, I’m afraid—facts you know—must put ’em in.”

And he rattled off a magnificently worded paragraph setting forth Brand’s virtues as the eldest brother of a large motherless family, his marriage, the death of his wife, his association in Cinderbridge with the earlier and ‘unpractical’ school of Socialists, and his removal to Mudford, “‘where his masterly leading of the unskilled and down-trodden wire-workers in their strike, three years ago, drew the eyes of all England to that remote district, won for the men material advantages, and for Kit himself the undying gratitude of the men of Mudford, to whom he had endeared himself no less by his lovable disposition than by his heroic and resolute courage.’”

“I say, O’Halloran, do draw it mild,” expostulated Dimsdale. “Lovable disposition !

Brand isn't a fool, and he'll think you are laughing at him. Why, he gives more offence than any man in London, and his temper's a proverb."

"It isn't our cue to say so. If we go on long enough telling the public he's amiable, they'll end by believing it, and he may even come to believe it himself, and act up to it. 'His life in London is well known to all readers of the *Meteor*. We saw at once that a born leader had arisen, and while commenting fearlessly on his earlier errors (from which our frank criticism has largely helped to extricate him), we have always believed in Kit Brand's future. He has had his temptations. The Tories have followed their usual tactics of trying to draw into their nets every rising hope of the democracy. Kit's career has been dogged at every step by a certain honourable and reverend gentleman, the scion of a well-known noble family. But Kit is a Progressive by nature, and the toils are spread in vain.'"

"*Are they?*" interjected Dimsdale.

"Well, it's our business to say so, any way. 'The popular idolatry of which he is the object has been justly enhanced by many deeds of personal valour, chief of which is the rescue—well known in spite of modest and persistent disclaimers—of two children from a conflagration in South London, when the firemen them-

selves stood back, afraid to face the seething element.' ”

“Oh, come!” again protested the secretary. “You know he has declared over and over again that there was no truth in that story.”

“Don't I say so?” retorted the unblushing scribe, and proceeded to read a paragraph about Brand's separation from the ‘older and unpractical’ Socialists, his conversion to the true faith as held by the Radical *Meteor* and the Russell Square Socialist Society, and his writing in various newspapers, “though,” as he added regretfully, “we can't go into that in much detail because he won't write for the *Meteor*. ‘His defence of the right of free assembly brought him within measurable distance of imprisonment at the hands of a Tory Government——’ ”

“No, no,” cried the listener; “the Liberals were in.”

“Oh, the readers of the *Meteor* don't stop to think about that. ‘His last achievement—that which has brought him to the pinnacle of his fame—is his brilliant defence of himself and honest Dick Harris from the trumped-up charge of conspiring to intimidate, which arose out of the strike at Gravesend. For days the rank and talent of this country thronged to gaze upon the undaunted young workman who, single handed and with no training, has baffled

the highest legal skill that could be commanded by an adverse Government, and wrested an acquittal from the jury. Among those who have been most profoundly impressed by the display of talent, is no less an authority than Sir John Warwick, the most eminent, as he is the most advanced, of Liberal legal luminaries.' Then of course I shall wind up with a glowing account of the brilliant reception given by the Russell Square Socialists, and a romantic description of Brand's personal appearance."

"It will be very fine," said Dimsdale dispassionately.

O'Halloran would no doubt have expatiated further, but the entrance of a third member of the committee cut him short. The new comer, whose name was Stanford, was a square headed and square shouldered man of some two or three and thirty. His dress was unopinionated, and to a discriminating eye he bore the word *Barrister* printed upon him. Dimsdale greeted him with solemnity, and gravely held out to him a scarlet badge, at which he gazed politely but without comprehension.

"Your rosette," said Dimsdale, "as a member of the committee."

Mr. Stanford accepted it rather gingerly, and affixed it to his coat front. Then he drew back a little, and stood gazing at the door by which he had entered. That door now

began to give passage in pretty quick succession to other members of committee—Mr. Smith, who was a disciple of Dr. Jaeger, and clothed from his lustreless shoes to his limp shirt collar in unadulterated woollen; Mrs. Finch, who was young, bright-eyed, alert, and wore a double eyeglass; and Miss Naylor, who was elderly, very gentle of voice and manner, and very precisely dressed. This lady, who must once have been very pretty, looked like the aunt or sister of some remote country clergyman; her appearance suggested tracts, beef-tea, and goloshes. She was, however, a professed atheist, held the most revolutionary views on all social subjects, especially marriage, and enunciated them freely in the most carefully chosen, not to say mincing phraseology. Miss Naylor was, in short, that strange modern product, the puritan of atheism.

Mr. O'Halloran, peering through the curtain which divided the hall from the ante-room, announced that the seats were filling fast.

"There's Lady Warwick, coming in with two young ladies. I declare, one of them looks like Mrs. Pelham, the Rev. Oliver's wife!"

"Nothing likelier," said Stanford, "since she's Lady Warwick's niece."

"Indeed! I didn't know that," said O'Halloran. "Then perhaps I am wrong about the Rev.

Oliver's politics. Do you happen to know whether he *is* a Conservative after all?"

Stanford replied, in a slightly superior tone, that from what he remembered of him at Oxford he should imagine Pelham did not set much store by politics either way, but that he was a regular good sort, straight as a line, and no fool either.

"He's hand in glove with Brand, you know," said the journalist.

"Is he? Then I expect Brand is a more decent chap than your almighty Press would lead one to suppose. But to be an agitator and not a bit of a humbug would be too much for humanity."

"Don't you call yourself an agitator?" demanded O'Halloran, reddening, and growing conspicuously Irish as to accent. "You, a member of the committee of a propagandist Socialist body."

"Oh, yes! but I never set up for not being a humbug," said Stanford, good humouredly. His eyes were still upon the open door by which two more committee members had now come in, and he added: "Here comes the great Sir John Warwick; picturesque he manages to look still. You know, in spite of his respectable House-of-Commons air, there's always to my mind a touch of the adventurer about that man; that quick bright

eye, that extraordinary readiness and dexterity. By the way, your Brand has the same thing. I declare there's a likeness. Type of the successful politician, I suppose."

Sir John Warwick came in, and with him Oliver Pelham. Pelham was grave; Sir John was radiant and effusive, but pale. His was, as Stanford had said, a picturesque personality. An actor, made up for the part of the 'sympathetic' successful politician, could not have looked it better. He was tall, well made, with a handsome, aquiline face, an ever-ready smile, and an eye whose keenness and quickness were almost alarming. He received Mr. Dimsdale's deferential greetings gracefully, and presented Oliver. "My wife's nephew, whom you probably know."

Poor Mr. Dimsdale, hot from O'Halloran's denunciations, was a little disconcerted by this unlooked-for conjunction. He murmured that he hadn't had the pleasure, had hardly expected Mr. Pelham to take part in this kind of thing.

"Why not, Mr. Dimsdale?" asked Pelham, smiling. "You have three or four parsons in your ranks, I think."

"Oh yes, yes to be sure," stammered Dimsdale. Then gathering himself together and resolved to make a bold stand by his flag, he said: "But I understood that Mr. Pelham followed the political traditions of his family,

and I should have thought that Socialism and —and Labour triumphs ——”

He became conscious that every one was listening to him, and his speech died away.

It was in a pleasant tone enough that Pelham made answer, but he looked graver than ever.

“Why, you know, Mr. Dimsdale, the political traditions of my family are all in favour of Labour legislation. My Conservative grandfather voted with Lord Shaftesbury for the Factory Act, when all the Radicals, with Bright and Cobden at their head, voted against it.”

This was one of those awkward reminders which are apt to throw out the political beginner; and the Secretary of the Russell Square Socialist Society was momentarily silenced.

“Ah well, the Radicals have learnt something since then,” interposed Sir John Warwick cheerfully. “We are the party of progress, you know. And I am afraid, my dear boy, that your party hasn’t learnt anything. It doesn’t, you know—that’s its weakness.”

“I’m afraid that’s true,” said Pelham. He felt the others listening and could not resist adding: “Perhaps that little sojourn in the chills of opposition which you are preparing for it, may open its eyes, as it has done those of the Liberals. My own dream is to see both parties playing against each other for the

Labour vote, and the Labour vote with wit enough to keep separate from both."

"I don't think you will see that," said Sir John drily.

"*I* don't think so," said Pelham.

There was a little pause, in which the committee was able to reflect that 'the Reverend Oliver' was to the full as dangerous a character as he had been represented.

Mr. Dimsdale now introduced to Sir John the rosetted committeemen one by one.

The chairman, a very young gentleman of some position and much wealth, who was wooing the votes of a working-class constituency, appeared. He had carefully eschewed evening dress, and, in his anxiety to do the utmost honour to the Society, had arrived at a distinctly bridal appearance. One looked involuntarily for a lady with wreath and veil, and the production by Pelham of leather-bound registers. He shook hands effusively with Sir John, and said that he was delighted to meet him on this auspicious occasion, and that he thought to-night might fairly be reckoned a landmark in the history of Labour—an observation immediately noted by O'Halloran for use as a headline.

A noise of shouting and applause outside heralded the approach of 'the hero of the hour.' Harris and his wife and Brand came

in together. Harris was a little stouter than three years before, and a few more grey hairs had begun to shine in his beard and about his temples. Mrs. Harris, a shrewd, capable, and kindly matron, betrayed no social trepidation. She had not the least desire to pose as a lady of leisure and opulence, or to imitate the manners of such. Her position as Richard Harris's wife was in her eyes a proud one, and she would have encountered duchesses with no sense of inferiority. Brand looked as usual—pale, thin, resolute, and intelligent; and both the agitators had the simple and unpretentious dignity of men whose thoughts are habitually busy with interests larger and deeper than their own. All three wore an air of triumph, and were smiling, but the smile of Brand had a touch of reservation in it—a certain kinship to the smile of Cassius.

Sir John drew back a step or two as they entered, and his smile grew a little rigid. Dimsdale advanced, nervous but elated, to receive the Society's distinguished guests.

"So glad to see you both, gentlemen," said he. "I bid you welcome in the name of the Russell Square Socialist Society, which, representing as it does, some of the most advanced thinkers of Britain, may fairly claim to voice the inarticulate aspirations of the toiling masses of this great city."

"Much obliged, I'm sure," said Harris cheerfully.

Brand, after a momentary pause, replied :

"Speaking for myself, Mr. Dimsdale, I am very grateful for the honour the society does us in inviting us here ; but honestly I came to-night because I take the society to represent middle-class not working-class opinion, and I thought an interchange of opinions with a working man might be good for both, though I can't pretend to represent the aspirations of the inarticulate toiling masses. We none of us do that—they haven't got any. That's one of their wrongs."

Gravity fell upon the committee as he spoke. Stanford, only, looked at the speaker with an increase of interest, and a new shade of cordiality.

"You know Sir John Warwick, no doubt ?" said Dimsdale, with a little wave of the hand ; and father and son stood face to face. Sir John had looked forward to that moment with dread, and with an emotion of poignant expectancy, keener than anything which he had known for many years. But, as so often happens in the moment actually present, he experienced far less than he had been prepared for, and found his chief concern still the habitual one of doing and saying the most expedient thing. Yet his voice was a little

thin and sharp as he spoke, and the hand which he extended not perfectly steady.

"This is the first time I have had the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Brand, though I saw him and listened to him last week. And you must allow me to say, Mr. Brand, candidly, and as an old lawyer, that I never witnessed a more remarkable display of ability."

So he said, looking into the eyes that were so like his own, while he thought within himself, "Does he know?"

Brand's gaze and hand met Sir John's frankly, and a look of honest gratification shone in his face.

"I'm sure I'm much flattered," said he.

Mrs. Finch, the practical spirit of the society, here observed that it had struck eight some minutes, and that they ought to go in. The young chairman, with a distinct air of needing a bride to complete his appearance, led the way. Sir John offered his arm to Mrs. Harris, who took it with a curtsy and a "Thankee, sir." Harris hesitated for a moment, doubtful whether he ought to offer the same compliment to Mrs. Finch or Miss Naylor, and if so to which of them, but finding the latter branch of the problem insoluble, abandoned the idea. Brand paused to exchange a word with Pelham; while Stanford, whose visage had grown more and more serious, had a little

explanation with Dimsdale about the necessity of somebody's staying behind to receive "that deputation, you know." Finally all but Pelham and Stanford disappeared through the curtain to the platform. Pelham, who had no intention of presenting himself there, was just going out by the other door, when Stanford stopped him and recalled himself to his remembrance. Pelham looked pleased and rather surprised.

"Why, what are *you* doing in this galley?" he asked. "What brings you to sit with a red rosette on your coat, among the Socialists of Russell Square?"

Stanford shrugged his shoulders. "The two motives that lead most men to the commission of most of their follies.

"Love, and ——?"

"Ambition," replied Stanford with mock solemnity. "There's a young lady who belongs to this society—and believes in it. It's her only weakness."

"But I don't see where the ambition comes in," said Pelham. "Is yours so modest that a seat on this committee satisfies it?"

Stanford laughed. "Not exactly," said he. "But I do want to be in Parliament. I've got a moderate income of my own, and I'm doing something at the Bar; and though I don't think, with some of our friends, that the House

of Commons can stop the rotation of the world and send it spinning the other way, still I do think that a decent man with a cool head and no personal axe to grind can do some good there."

Oliver nodded agreement. "But can these people help you?"

"I think so. They have not done much beyond talking, it is true ; but they are gradually talking well-to-do London into a belief that they are socialism, and that socialism isn't so alarming after all. And indeed they are not far wrong. They are the middle-class wave of socialism, and in English politics the victory is always to the middle class ——"

"Has been," interjected the other.

"Socialism in the West End," continued Stanford, "is enthusiasm ; in the East End it's revolt ; in Bloomsbury it is business. It doesn't aim at very much perhaps, and it emphatically doesn't mean to be a loser by it. But it has an aim and methods. The aim is to secure certain economic changes, one by one, without personal sacrifice. The methods are talking, lecturing, issuing pamphlets, joining Liberal and Radical Associations, and blowing one another's trumpets with unwavering perseverance. By these means we shall assuredly sooner or later get a certain number of our members into Parliament—and I mean to be one of the sooner ones."

"But why stand as a Radical? Why not stand boldly and separately as a Labour man?"

"Because I should not get in. We follow the line of least resistance."

"Although, as so often happens, it is also the line of least result," said Pelham.

"You must have a majority, in England, to get any result at all, and the majority will always follow the line of least resistance. You'll never get a majority to consent to be martyrs."

"No," said Pelham, lifting his head a little. "That's why it seems to me so clear a duty to be one of the minority who go out into the wilderness, and make the path plain for the weakling majority to walk in by-and-by."

Stanford looked at him with interest. "Have you taught Brand those principles?" said he.

"It's rather the other way," said Pelham. "It's rather he who has taught them to me."

"Then I'll venture on a prophecy," said Stanford. "Brand is one of the men who die brokenhearted, and get statues built to them afterwards."

"Ah! don't say it," cried Oliver. "I think so, so often."

The door of the room now opened, and a very little lady appeared, who had short auburn hair, a rather fantastic gown of blue-grey,

and the most beautiful blue-grey eyes in the world.

Stanford sprang up eagerly.

"Am I very late?" said she. "I knew I should have to be. I could not put off my lesson. Have they begun very long?"

"Not so very long," said Stanford. "Brand has not spoken yet, or we should have heard the applause."

"Oh, let us go in at once!" said she. "I don't want to miss any of his speech. You know I have never heard him."

"Certainly," said Stanford.

"And what about that deputation?" asked Pelham, with a smile.

"Oh, by-the-by—that deputation—" said Stanford, pausing.

"What is to be said to them? Can I do it? I will, with pleasure."

Stanford with many thanks explained that the deputation was to be kept in that room, and a hint was to be given to the committee of its arrival.

Pelham was thus left alone in charge of the ante-room, while murmurs of speech and outbursts of applause came to him indistinctly from beyond the curtain.

V.

TO Pelham, sitting alone in the committee-room, there presently entered four men, in three of whom he was much amazed to recognize parishioners of Mudford. One of these was the sagacious Joseph Wilkins.

The surprise appeared mutual. The men stared at their late curate, and he at them.

"Oh, Mr. Pelham," said Wilkins at last. "And are you a member of this society?"

"No," said Pelham. "I am only a visitor; but I was left in charge, to let the committee know when a deputation came. Are you the deputation?"

"We are," said Wilkins with dignity.

Pelham exchanged a word or two with Sharman and Davis, the men whom he knew, begged the deputation to be seated, and passed through the curtain into the hall, where with a beckoning finger he drew Stanford to the edge of the platform, whispered, "The deputation," and withdrew hastily, feeling upon him the reproachful eyes of Harris, who was speaking.

He returned to the deputation. Wilkins was

examining, with some curiosity, the box of red rosettes left on the table, while the fourth delegate, who appeared about eighteen, and was somewhat better dressed than the others, was expressing a desire of going into the hall and hearing the speeches. Stanford, following on Pelham's heels, declared this quite out of order, and maintained that the deputation must remain hidden till the proper moment. By way of compromise, however, he drew back a part of the dividing curtain, and permitted them to behold the platform and the speakers.

Brand had just stood up amid outbursts of applause.

"I know," said he, "that my friend Harris and I are asked here to-night because it has been our good luck to have the chance of asserting and defending the right of free combination, and to be successful. We are proud to have had that chance, and we should have been proud to go to prison if that had been our lot. But as I stand here free and your guest, I think I can best return the compliment you do me by speaking the honest truth of my own belief to you. I believe then that this country is full of cruelties and oppressions that are a disgrace and a danger to us, and that there is no more pressing duty for every man and woman among us than to fight against

those wrongs. I know men who work for twelve, fourteen, and sixteen hours a day, have to pay a deposit and cringe for leave to do that, and then are liable to get their wages docked on all sorts of trivial pretences, turned off at a minute's notice, and as likely as not cheated of their deposit at the end. I know a cabman at one of the big stations who has to leave home before six, and never gets back till after one—Sundays and all. That man doesn't see his children awake once in three months. He would not know them if he met them in the street. Think what that means, you who get home from your offices at five or six, and go off in the morning after a comfortable breakfast with your wife and children. Think what it would mean to have your wife sitting up in her bed, finishing shirts or making match-boxes, before her baby was twenty-four hours old. I have seen that. Think what it would mean to have *your* girls working in a laundry from six in the morning till nine at night for three farthings an hour. I know girls who do that. I know girls of sixteen and seventeen who work ten hours a day for five shillings a week. Their daily allowance for food is threepence. They pay two shillings a week for furnished lodgings with washing. When they have paid that, their total income—supposing they were in work every week, which

they are not—is three pounds five a year, for every other purpose. They never have a second dress, or hat, or ulster. There are hundreds of girls no better off. Many of them are pretty. All of them are young and have the same desire for pleasant, pretty surroundings that every woman here has, or has had. Think what it would be to know that your daughter or sister stood exposed to the temptations and hardships of those girls.

“And not one of these evils need be. There’s not one that could not be cured. That’s the doctrine that everyone of you here holds, who belong to a socialist society. You believe that by peaceable organization and legislation, these things can be remedied. So do I. And I believe, also, that if they are not remedied that way, there will come such an outbreak of revolutionary violence as England, at least, has never seen. It rests with us to avert that, and if, in our indolence and cowardice, we fail to show the better way, on our heads be the blood of our nation. We have to organize industrially and politically. That’s the work to which our faith as socialists, practical, constitutional socialists, commits us. Frankly I tell you, it is not the work I would have chosen for my share if I had the choice. I’d *rather* fight. But fighting isn’t in our day’s work to-day. Now, you who sit here to-night, clean, and well-

dressed, and with a good meal to go home to—are you doing the work that you profess to believe in? How many of you ladies are teaching the unorganised women workers to organise—and taking trouble to learn the best way, going down week after week, regularly, steadily, wet or dry? How many of you men are ready to denounce any and every politician or newspaper, of whatever party, that systematically misrepresents or neglects these matters? On my conscience, as an honest man, I believe, and I am bound to say it, that you *don't* do these things. You talk, and you make neat epigrams, and you declaim against the capitalist. That's pretty easy and amusing, but it doesn't go far.

“Let us bring it to a personal instance. Is there one of you who would refuse to speak to Mr. Alexander Smithson, if you were introduced to him in the National Liberal Club or in the Lobby of the House of Commons? And yet is there one of you who doesn't know that he made the money which gives him his place in both these buildings, by inhuman overwork and underpay of women? No, you haven't felt the pinch, and deep in your hearts you don't care. God knows I don't want to make class distinctions, but I see this, that those who have not tasted poverty, lived in it and seen it, are not willing, whatever they may think and say

that they believe, to sacrifice themselves to put it right. I know two who are, but they are not members of your society. And this work is work that asks your lives of you—no less. You must be ready to toil for people who won't understand you, won't trust you, won't thank you. It is because they *are* like that, that they want your help. You'll get no credit, no comfort, no satisfaction. You'll only know that you are in the right by this: that if you stop short when once you have begun your conscience will sting you like a gad-fly, and you will know yourselves to be traitors and cowards.

“One word more to make a clean breast of it. I haven't thought much of your society. I've thought it a mutual admiration sort of thing—a kind of camp follower of one political party, instead of an independent power. Well, I think so still; and therefore I don't think the regeneration of the world will get much help from you; but it is for you to convert me if you can. If in the next few months you can show me that I am doing you injustice, and that you are not mere parlour socialists, who care about reform just as you might care about part-singing, then I promise you that I will come here and beg your pardons as humbly as you like, with a far lighter heart than I have in speaking like this to-night.”

He sat down, and a great burst of applause followed. Stanford dropped the curtain.

"That's straight, anyway," said Sharman.

"Ve—ry injudicious," said Wilkins.

"I don't know what the Mudford Association would say to that," said the junior member of the deputation.

"He's a fine fellow, that agitator of yours," murmured Stanford to Pelham. "But, good Lord, what a hard battle he's preparing for himself!" He turned to the deputation, "Well, gentlemen, we are delighted to see you. Mr. Brand will be here in a minute. He is quite unprepared, you know—no idea of the honour you propose to do him."

"We are not prepared to find the money, you know," said the cautious Wilkins.

"That's where the difficulty will come in, I'm thinking," remarked the hitherto silent envoy. "A man must live, and he can't work in the shop by day, and sit in Parliament at night too."

"You speak like a blessed babe, Tom Davis," retorted Wilkins. "Don't you suppose a man as has made a mark, like Kit Brand, has more ways of earning a living, beside working at his trade? It's the election expenses I don't see my way to."

Brand came in, escorted by Dimsdale. O'Halloran followed close behind.

"Here are some old friends, Mr. Brand, who have a mission to you," said Dimsdale solemnly.

"Why, Sharman! Wilkins!" said Brand. "Is anything wrong with the Union?"

"No, no," replied Wilkins. "The Union is much as usual. But things have advanced a bit in Mudford since your day. We have got a working-men's political association, and we are looking things up."

"Mr. Simpson, here, is the Secretary," said Sharman.

The youthful Simpson rose, and with much unction delivered the following speech—

"And I am entrusted by the Association, together with our friends here, with an important, and at the same time gratifying, duty. We are sent by an overwhelming majority of the working-men of Mudford to ask our friend, Mr. Christopher Brand, to come back to Mudford, where his name is a household word and, I may say, a household treasure, and to consent to stand as our candidate for the House of Commons. Mr. Travis, our senior member, has been in bad health for some time, and we hear say that he might die any minute, and so, of course, we want to be prepared; and what we say is, Brand's the man for us."

"Hear, hear!" cried the deputation.

Brand, as he heard this oration, changed

colour—an unusual display of emotion—and for a moment or so after its close stood silent.

“What do you say, Kit?” asked Sharman.

“I don’t know what to say,” said Brand. “I did not expect this at all.”

“But surely, Mr. Brand,” expostulated O’Halloran, “you haven’t any hesitation.”

“I have a good deal of hesitation, and on many grounds,” he answered.

“We thought you’d be so pleased,” said Sharman.

“I am pleased—very much pleased. It’s a great compliment. But I can’t honestly judge at a moment’s notice whether I should be at all likely to suit you as your member, if I did get in, or whether you would suit me as constituents. It is a good while since I came away, and Mudford may have changed.”

“You can’t give us an answer to take back then?” said Wilkins.

“I can’t give you an answer till I have had four-and-twenty hours to think it over. I’m very much obliged to the Mudford men for the invitation—very much. But it is a responsible and important thing, and I had no idea it was coming. It would not be fair to them to answer hastily. And, besides, as you know, I am a working man like yourselves. I don’t know that I can afford to say yes. There are a good

many questions I should like to ask before I decide."

Sir John Warwick entered from the hall, and informed Dimsdale that the chairman wanted to know whether any announcement would be made to the meeting, before the proceedings closed and gave place to tea and coffee. Dimsdale, Stanford, and O'Halloran were too much occupied in the matter under discussion to remark the oddness of Sir John's being made the messenger, and Brand was actually not aware of it. Pelham, however, noted it.

Dimsdale replied hastily that he would come up, and that perhaps one of the gentlemen from Mudford would like to say a few words.

"With pleasure, with pleasure," replied Wilkins, and the deputation filed off, headed by Dimsdale and followed by the industrious journalist.

"You haven't decided then, Mr. Brand?" said Sir John; and on receiving the answer, added, "I wish you would spare me an hour to-morrow. There are two or three things I want to talk over with you. You are not at work again this week."

"Never shall be at work in that shop again," said Brand. "I don't suppose there

are many places where they would take me on now."

"There's other engineering calling out for you," said Sir John. "How, when, and where can I see you to-morrow?"

"Brand is staying with us to night," interposed Pelham. "I don't know whether St. Perpetua's is too far east for you."

"Not a bit. Happens I have to be in the City to-morrow morning," Sir John answered, and they fixed an early hour for his visit.

Then Stanford drew Brand aside a little, begging for a word with him.

"This matter of election expenses," he began. "It is a preposterous thing that any candidate should have to provide them, but since the law is so, I just wanted to say that if you decide to stand, I shall be very happy to guarantee half the election expenses. That's my address. Your friend, Mr. Pelham, can tell you who I am."

"It is a very generous offer," said Brand.

"Not at all. The money was meant for election expenses, but I did not reckon on so good a candidate," said Stanford, and turned hastily away.

Pelham, who had stood waiting his turn, drew near and murmured, "Brand, if there's any difficulty about that election money, I've

got enough for that, and no chance of spending it so much to my satisfaction."

"Thank you," said Brand. "It is just like you to say so."

The curtain was once more lifted, and Mrs. Pelham's face and figure showed in the opening. She stood a moment looking in, and making as pleasant a picture as the eye could desire, of health and hope and kindliness. Observing only a very small assemblage, made up mainly of her own circle, she smiled, drew back the curtain to a wider gap, and ushered in a sweet-faced, elderly lady.

"Mr. Brand," said she, "here's my aunt, Lady Warwick, who wants to make your acquaintance."

Lady Warwick shook hands with the young agitator, and gave him the gentlest of smiles; while Mrs. Pelham, turning to her husband, demanded gaily whether he would not like to go and fetch some of the tea which appeared to be flowing so freely in the room on the other side of the hall. Pelham and Stanford set forth upon this expedition, and she turned her bright face towards her aunt and Brand. She found that they had got over the first civilities, and that Lady Warwick was saying:

"I was so very glad, Mr. Brand, to hear you speaking in the way you did about con-

stitutional means. I was beginning to think myself a very old-fashioned person for believing that Parliament was the proper body to regulate conflicting interests, but it seems that some of you young people are coming round to it again."

"Yes, I think some of us believe so," Brand answered. His voice and manner were almost as gentle as her own. The grace of good breeding was a charm to which he was very responsive.

"But, you know," she continued in her soft tones, "I don't think you ought to have been allowed to come here and talk to-night at all, after such a tiring week as you have had."

"I quite agree with you, auntie," said her niece, and the younger voice and smile were like copies printed in a more vivid tint.

"Oh, it's not so tiring, you know," said Brand lightly, "when one gets one's own way!"

In the undercurrent of his thought he was comparing this development of womanhood, with the crude, half-grown, rough-speaking factory girl, so pretty at fifteen, so worn at five-and-twenty, and at fifty, if she survives so long, so haggard and so mentally cramped. He knew plenty of working women as capable

by nature, and as honest and as unselfish as these; but ah, how different! His face fell into its sterner mould; for these are the thoughts that dispose the natural man towards revolutions.

Sir John stood by, listening to this rippling talk, but taking no part in it, an attitude unusual with him. His wife glanced across, affectionate and anxious, and thought him looking very tired. The two emissaries returned with cups of tea, and Pelham demanded to be praised for remembering that his wife took no sugar, and that Brand took "any quantity."

"We are all very much obliged," said she. "I gather from the silence in the hall, and the fact that the hero of the evening is left unmolested, that the whole society is getting tea."

"It is indeed," said Stanford. "I never realised so fully the force of the expression, 'a tea-fight.'"

He said it, however, with a serious and somewhat pre-occupied face; for he had observed Miss Mayne, sitting in the remotest corner of the tea-room, receiving tea and talk from a member of the society, and looking up into that member's face with those starry eyes that seemed always to shine solely and specially for the one person with whom she chanced at

any moment to be conversing. There was no immediate chance of reaching her, but he reflected that she would certainly desire to speak to Brand, and that if he stayed in Brand's neighbourhood, the privilege might fall to him of effecting the desired introduction. Into the midst of this peaceful little party fell a thunderbolt. The door of the room was opened, and a telegraph boy inserted a tentative head.

"Any gentleman here of the name of Brand?" he asked.

"Yes ; me," replied the agitator, holding out his hand.

He opened the tawny envelope, and threw a curt "All right" to the waiting lad.

Then — with no change of countenance, but with a deeper note of voice, significant in the ears of the two who knew him—he said :

"It's from Mudford — from Hammond. Their member died this afternoon."

"What, Travis dead?" cried Sir John.

"Yes, Sir John," said Brand.

"My dear," said Sir John to his wife, "I must go on at once."

"I must see that deputation, somewhere, to-morrow morning," said Brand.

Lady Warwick rose, drawing her soft shawl

around her. Mrs. Pelham rose too, turning her eager face towards her husband, whose glance had gone from Brand to Sir John, and from Sir John again to Brand, as each spoke. It was an odd glance—it betrayed a touch of alarm; it almost suggested complicity. But no one else noted it, for Stanford, the only unengrossed spectator, was smiling to himself as he thought, “Poor O’Halloran, to be out of the way when this happened.”

VI.

BREAKFAST was nearly over at the vicarage of St. Perpetua's. The vicar, his wife, and their guest, had each a newspaper, and each was reading the report of the previous evening's meeting.

"Oh, this is really funny," cried Mrs. Pelham. "Listen! 'The Tories have followed their usual tactics of trying to draw into their nets every rising hope of the Democracy. Kit Brand's career has been dogged at every step by a certain honourable and reverend gentleman, the scion of a noble Tory house.'"

"Oh, I say!" said Brand.

"You are making up, Nanny," said her husband.

"No indeed," she protested. "It is here as plain as the bad print and paper of the *Morning Meteor* will allow. Perhaps you would like to hear the rest? 'But Kit is a Progressive by nature, and the toils are spread in vain.'"

They laughed, and her husband remarked, rather ruefully. "I wish there was any chance of any of my Conservative uncles and aunts

seeing the *Morning Meteor*. What they will read is this: 'Anything more contemptible than the attempt to catch a few votes for the Liberal party, made by Sir John Warwick last night, we can hardly imagine. Things must have come to a pretty pass with a political party, when it sets an ex-Solicitor General angling for an alliance with obscure Socialist mutual-admiration societies, and professional agitators like Brand and Harris, who have only escaped by a legal quibble from the prison, which both have so often deserved and avoided.' "

"Oh, that's a pity," said Brand. "Really the Liberals are right. The Conservative party is a stupid party. Can't they see the folly of pushing the working man into the arms of the Liberals? Why, they are just singing second to the *Meteor*."

"Returning the enemy's lead, when they have got the high cards of the other suit in their hand. They always do it," said Pelham.

A servant came in and announced that a person from the parish wanted to see the vicar. He hastily drank his unfinished cup of coffee and hurried off.

The servant began to clear the table, and Mrs. Pelham picked up the paper which her husband had dropped, and looked at it for a minute or two.

"I suppose," she said, "this newspaper does

pretty well represent Conservative opinion, and again helps to form it, as newspapers do."

"I am afraid so," said Brand.

"And the result of it all will be that the working-men will use their votes to get the Liberals in, in the expectation—fostered by all the Liberal papers and all the Liberal promises—of getting some real help, and won't get it."

"That's about it," he assented.

"And the Liberals, being in, will stay in until such time as the Conservatives perceive that the only way of getting back is to do something for Labour, and so come in again on the wave of an Eight Hour Bill."

"Just so."

"That will take—how long, do you suppose?"

"Five or six years, most likely."

"And in the meantime," said she, "you, and the men like you, will go about wearing your lives out in a vain endeavour, and denounced by both sides."

"That's about it," said Brand. "I wonder why you can see so clearly what not one working-man in a thousand understands."

"They will come to understand it. 'All men become good creatures—but so slow.' It is rather a tantalising thing for a woman to understand, though."

"Why?" asked Brand with some surprise.

"Because she is shut out from helping at the point where she sees that help is most wanted. If I were one of my own brothers, I could have got into the House of Commons pretty easily. That's the place where you want soldiers to stand for Labour, and I, who would do it and could do it, am shut out."

"Yes," said Brand. "You would do it, and you could do it; and there are not twelve men in England who will and can. But there very soon would be, if more women saw as you see, and felt as you feel."

Mrs. Pelham, while he spoke, had begun to smile a little at herself. "After all," said she, "I think I might be satisfied with the work I have on hand, without demanding more." Then, growing graver again, "Oliver is shut out too, of course; but he doesn't think he would ever have aimed at Parliament for himself. It doesn't seem to him the natural ambition, as it always does to me. I think I must have imbibed it as a little girl, from being so much with my uncle and aunt Warwick."

"You know," said he, "that Sir John Warwick is coming here this morning to see me?"

"No, I did not know that."

"I wish you would tell me what sort of a man he really is. Of course I have read his speeches, know his reputation, and all that;

but all that is nothing. I can understand his mission pretty well, but I should know better how to meet it, if I also knew the man."

She hesitated a little. "In private life he is very kind," said she, "very considerate. He has always been particularly kind to us."

"And I suppose he really is an able man?"

"Very able. As able, I should say, as any man can be, who is not inspired by any great idea."

"He is a party man of course," said Brand, leaning back and looking straight before him. "He has the reputation of not being very scrupulous, politically, but it is so easy to surround a man with that kind of reputation. If you say to me, 'You may trust him,' I shall know I may."

"I am afraid I can't say that," she answered, after a moment. "I don't mean to say that he isn't to be trusted; but he is——well, he is an old Parliamentary hand," she concluded with a smile. "That's about what it comes to."

"He will come and try to win me over to an alliance with the Liberals."

"You won't do it," said she earnestly.

Brand laughed a little. "Are you so afraid I will, that you want me to tie myself down beforehand? No, no; I'll hear what Sir John has to say. If he can convince me that the best way for Labour is his way, I am ready to

go. I am afraid there is a bias in your mind, Mrs. Pelham."

"Well, I'll reserve my remarks till afterwards," said Mrs. Pelham, drawing herself up with an air of mock severity.

"So that I may have the fear of them before my eyes," rejoined Brand.

The servant, reappearing, announced Sir John Warwick, and that effusive gentleman came in, looking the very picture of healthy and intelligent prosperity.

"How are you, my dear? how are you, Mr. Brand," said he. "I caught sight of Oliver, flying along, at the end of the street. His parishioners seem to keep him pretty well occupied."

"They do indeed, poor things," replied Mrs. Pelham. "There's always someone in sickness or in trouble." Then, with a word or two of hope that her aunt was not very much tired last night, she left them to their discussion.

VII.

BRAND sat down again, feeling on his palm the warmth of a somewhat exaggeratedly cordial grasp, and waited with a face of grave attention. Sir John, seeing him thus among refined household surroundings, was both more impressed and more moved than he had been yet. The resolute intelligence of this dark profile struck him anew, with something like surprise; and now, when there were no onlooking eyes against which to guard, a disturbing spring of emotion, almost of affection, arose within him. The desire to win this young man—to win him without self-betrayal—began to pull with quite unexpected force. Pelham would certainly have perceived the traces of this emotion in his face, but Brand knew him too little to distinguish such gradations.

“I wanted to talk to you, Mr. Brand,” Sir John began, “before you came to a decision about this invitation from Mudford, though what I have to say is quite independent of that invitation. No doubt you have political

ambitions. It is not possible that a man like you should not have."

"Well, yes," said Brand.

"Abilities like yours are not common. At the same time, they want a certain amount of training and parliamentary experience."

"No doubt."

"One of my own two secretaries has just accepted a colonial appointment, and it occurred to me that it might be worth your while to fill his place for a time."

"But how could I ——?" began Brand, turning on him that keen and rapid glance, of which Stanford had already remarked the likeness in the two of them.

"Stay a moment," interposed Sir John. "I quite understand that it would not suit you to remain subordinate to any man, but every man must learn the mere *technique* of his trade from another. I don't think you would find me inconsiderate or unreasonable. I know my own weakness," said he with a smile. "It is that I can't stand fools at close quarters. I must have heads about me with brains in them. I am sure that it would be a relief and a refreshment to have you working with me, and I think that you yourself might get valuable experience in that way, which it would take you very long to acquire in any other. The salary would be about double what you could

earn in the workshop ; your time would be left freer, and you would be able to accept this invitation from the Mudford men. I may also add that, as the advantage to me of having my secretary in the House is very great, I should think it my business—as a matter of business—to defray the election expenses, if you decide to do as I suggest.”

He paused. Brand said : “ You are very kind,” and sat looking down at the table cloth.

“ Well ? ” said Sir John, after a moment.

“ No,” said Brand, lifting his head. “ I don’t see how I can. The thing is this, Sir John. If I became your secretary, if I allowed you to pay my election expenses, it would be putting myself under an obligation, not to you only, but to the Liberal party which you represent.”

“ No, no, not necessarily.”

“ Oh, but I should. We all know that labour questions are the coming fighting ground of all politics, and that each party is beginning to fish for the Labour vote. For the moment—it won’t last long, very likely, but still, for the moment, my name on either side would do a good deal to carry that vote. I don’t in the least blame you for trying to secure it for your side, and I quite believe you think the offer an advantageous one for me, as in one sense it certainly is. But I am not inclined to go in

with either party. I want to stand apart, ready to take help from either.

“For a time. But in the long run you will have to work with, and through, one of the two parties.”

“Not as they stand now,” said Brand, “for they don’t represent living political forces ; no, nor even living political ideas. The division of the future lies between those who care for the interests of property, and those who care for the interests of Labour. There are as many—or rather as few—for Labour on the one side as the other—and none on either side among the official leaders.”

Sir John, sharply watchful of the face before him, made decisive answer to a recurrent inner prompting : ‘No, I will not tell him. He is too dangerous.’ But outwardly he answered, in grave, persuasive, authoritative tones : “But the machinery is there, and it is easier to work through it than against it. You may think the great Liberal Party hollow, but it has weight enough yet to be too heavy for any single man. You may say that you are not a single man, that you have a following. That’s true to-day ; but, as you yourself said just now, it may not be true to-morrow. And do you think you can carry them with you in an attempt to found a separate party ? I doubt it. The bulk of working men cling instinctively to Radicalism ;

it's their traditional party, and you'll sooner transform it from within, than detach them and conquer it from without."

Brand gave him rather an ironical glance. "You invite me to come into the party you belong to, in order to transform it to something else?" said he. "It seems to me, that if you really believe that possible, you are not acting very loyally to your party. I don't profess any loyalty to the Liberals myself, but I should feel I was playing it pretty low down if I tried to 'capture' Liberalism, as some of our Socialist friends say, by creeping into the garrison in the Liberal uniform. But for my part I don't believe it is possible. I believe that when we do that, we merely swell the power of the Liberal party, and make it more able to hold its power, with the least possible concessions to Labour. That's where all these middle-class Socialists of last night are so astray. They want to take the citadel without fighting for it. But it can't be done. Liberalism, as it stands, *can't* be the party of Labour—not if every working man in England belonged to it. Its funds and its majority are made up by bad employers, men who have grown rich by driving hard bargains with Labour—men like Alexander Smithson. Liberalism can only join hands with Labour by throwing away its own strength."

"Then you incline to the Conservatives?" said Sir John, and a bitter thought crossed his mind of Oliver's influence.

"I incline to stand separate. Of the two I do, personally, prefer the Conservatives, because I do find in them a real sense of duty towards the less well-off than themselves. But, practically, I don't see the least chance of their rising to their opportunities. You see I speak frankly. I suppose I ought, as a prudent politician, to pretend I have great hopes of them."

Sir John, watching him with a deeper gravity, said slowly, "If other working men felt as you do, you might revolutionize England in three years, without so much as the breaking of a head. But you know, Mr. Brand, they don't and they won't. And they won't, because their inheritance and their development are not the same as yours."

"What do you mean?" asked Brand, startled.

Sir John, drumming lightly with his fingers on the table-edge, replied, "A man of my age and my calling learns many family secrets, and yours happens to be among them."

There was a moment's pause. "Then I wish you would tell it to me," said Brand. The harder and bitterer note in his voice wrought in the opposite direction from his desire.

Sir John answered in a smooth, official

manner, from which any suggestion of personal contact was quite removed.

"I am not altogether at liberty to do that. I have said thus much in order that you may understand that in speaking to you to-day, I represent, not so much the political party to which I belong, as an old friend of my own, who feels that he owes you much, and to whom you also owe something—the something that makes you a leader, and that promises you a great future."

"I wasn't prepared for this," said Brand. And again he sat, looking down. This power of falling into pauses of silent meditation, absorbed and unembarrassed, was rather disconcerting. Sir John waited, gathering his forces together, and the thought crossed his mind that he had never so much dreaded any opponent.

"Then it is my father, really, who offers me this through you?" said Brand.

"Well, yes, you may put it that way, fairly enough."

"But he doesn't come to see me face to face, doesn't profess to feel any affection for me, doesn't even authorise you to tell me his name."

"Not yet, at any rate," said Sir John, with a terrible feeling of thinner and thinner ice between himself and the chill abysses. Did

the young man suspect? And if so, was he playing cat and mouse deliberately? He had a quick vision of Brand as a ruthless adversary, using his knowledge as a continual menace. Unconsciously he had hoped, especially since recognizing the clear and able brain, akin to his own, to find in this son of his, his own quick eye for the expedient, the comfortable, the self-advancing. He would not have desired absolute treachery or actual falsehood, but only that spirit of compromise which oils the wheels of life's machinery. But in the face now turned full upon him, he began to read a spirit of implacable truthfulness, derived from nothing in himself. He felt the first creeping touch of despair, for he had seen this spirit before; it was this something impracticable, irreconcilable, in her temper that had enabled him to make excuse to himself for rending asunder the ties that bound him to Brand's mother.

"After all," said Brand, "it matters very little. I'll speak quite frankly to you, Sir John, and leave you to repeat as much, or as little, as you think well. I can't pretend that I have suffered much from my birth. I have had all the advantages that I might have had from being an honest man's son, for my mother's husband has more than filled a father's place to me. No, I have suffered no injury; but I can't help remembering that my own father left me—and her—

to shift for ourselves. She might have died in her trouble, for all he knew or cared, and I might have grown up a thief and a vagabond. I might have stood in that court, last week, on a very different charge, and have had a right to say to my father, 'The guilt is yours!' For all outward things I owe him nothing but reproach—"

"There were excuses. You don't know everything," said Sir John.

"I don't want to reproach him. What inheritance of mind and body I owe him, I can't tell; but I expect just enough to make me feel out of place in my mother's class, and not at home in his—enough to make me just the right man for the work I am doing—and a lonely man as long as I live. I've got no ties, and I'll have none. I'll be bound to no political party, except that of Labour. I'll have no family, as I have none now. The working people of England are my family, and I'll have no other."

Sir John, as he listened, was stabbed, then again moved to remorseful regrets; he admired the restrained vehemence that gave force to every word—admired it, but without putting implicit faith in it. He knew well enough, by his own experience, the reaction of fervour which his own words may arouse in the born orator.

"You mean to stand alone?" said he.

Brand nodded.

“And you are not two-and-thirty yet?”

“Not quite.”

“You can’t do it. Nature’s too strong. You will either get fond of some one, man, woman, or child, or you will begin to put your own advancement first, and be just an ambitious man like the rest of us, or else you’ll die.”

“Then I shall die, but I don’t think so.”

“And is your own personal happiness to count for nothing?” said Sir John, almost indignantly.

“I haven’t shaped my life to be happy,” returned Brand. “I have shaped it to do a certain piece of work. Do you think I don’t understand what would lie before me, if I chose? Here’s this father that you tell me of. I might have money, I suppose, from him. And I might have position from you. I don’t want to boast, but I never touched anything yet that I didn’t come to the top of, and I’m afraid of no man, or body of men, on this earth. If I got in for Mudford as a Liberal, and took what you offer me, and stuck to your party, I could be—and I would be—prime minister before I died. You think that’s nonsense?”

“Indeed I don’t,” Sir John replied. “I fully believe it. Now, don’t you, without prejudice, believe that you would get the measures you want more easily, more quickly, and more effectually that way? For yourself it means a

fuller life, equal intellectual companionship, and, if you cared for it, equal home companionship too. You talk of having lost personal happiness by standing between two classes. In these things a man can't go back, but he can go forward. You might have such a woman as my niece here for your wife."

"There aren't any more such women," said Brand. "And I wouldn't do a woman such an ill turn, even if it were a temptation to me. But the truth is, that none of these things tempt me. I don't want companionship, or wealth, or a wife, or political distinction. I want to wake working-men to demand and to get certain things; and I must, whether I like it or not, fight straight. I think, sometimes, there would be more real courage in throwing up all scruples, and being willing to use any means. What does one man's honesty matter, if the work can be done by sacrificing it? But I can't do it. The prejudices in me are woven too firm, and if I once brought myself to that, I should go to pieces altogether. Somehow I know that I must fight straight, that it's best even if the battle seems to be lost by it." He looked up again with the smile 'as if he mocked himself,' and said, lightly enough, "That's my position, Sir John, and all the world is welcome to know it." His voice changed, and his face darkened again as he

continued, "And now, again—I'll keep it as secret as you choose—can't you tell me who my father is?"

Sir John found himself saying, "Who your father *was*?"

The evasion was quite unprepared—except in so far as all a man's life is a preparation for his truth or falsehood at decisive moments—but its utterance gave him an immediate sense of relief and escape. It did its work.

"*Was?* Is he dead then? I never thought of that." Brand's voice changed and fell upon the three divisions of the speech; and Sir John's inner self whispered, "Now everything is over between us."

It was easy now to go on.

"It can do no good to tell you his name. I was bound to him by many obligations, and as his son you have many claims on me—the rather that I have no son of my own. Now that you know this, think again. I offer you my help as your right, as your inheritance."

"And if it were for myself, I would take it. But I have no personal life. That's all dead. And I see no way, this way, to fulfil my work."

He stood up as he spoke, and looked at Sir John with a frank, calm, and altogether pleasant face. Sir John looked up at him with a strange, sharp pleasure that covered a sharper and stranger inward conflict. He too slowly rose.

"You'll fail," said he, "you'll fail. No man is strong enough for the task you are setting yourself."

"Then I shall fail ; but my failure will be the stepping-stone for some other man to succeed."

Sir John stretched out his hand to his well-smoothed hat.

"Well, remember," said he, "that if you change your mind, my help is ready for you whenever you want it."

"I will, and thank you. I'm sorry to seem such a churlish chap, but I can't help it."

"So we part," said Sir John, still looking at him, and checking the whisper of a rebellious impulse.

"So we part," said Brand. In him too there was an uneasy sense of something behind, deeper than had been uttered.

"With rather a heavy heart on my side," said Sir John, "because I see the future very dark before you."

It was said in Sir John's best manner, and no man, least of all himself, could have measured what proportion of sincerity or of real feeling underlay the harmonies of that musical voice of his.

"For that matter, so do I ; but it is all in the day's work," Brand answered, taking the offered hand. "Well, good-bye, Sir John. When I find myself going under completely, I'll come

to you to keep me from the workhouse, although that and the gallows are the natural ends of the agitator."

"Especially," added Sir John, "when he can't help fighting straight. Well, good-bye, Mr. Brand; you are the most intelligent and the most impracticable young man whom it has been my lot to meet, in a considerable and varied experience."

He went away, divided between a sense of joy in his escape, and a sense of immeasurably bitter disappointment.

Brand was left with a laugh on his lips. "Well, I need not be afraid to face Mrs. Pelham with that," he thought.

He sat down again by the table, leaned his elbows upon it, and his face upon his hands. Pelham, returning some ten minutes later, found him thus. Brand dropped his hands and looked up, making no attempt to alter the expression of his face.

"Hallo!" said Pelham, "you're looking rather done up. Was my uncle's battery very severe?"

"Severer, I think, than he knew. I think I should like to tell you, Pelham. I don't know how much you know already. Did you ever know that James Brand was not my father?"

"I gathered it from something Harris said once," Pelham answered, sitting down, and speaking gravely.

"I never knew who was," said Brand, "beyond the bare fact that he was, as we say, a gentleman. Three years ago, in the strike at Mudford, my father came—I mean my step-father, James Brand—and brought me a letter that had been sent to my mother."

"Ah!" said the other suddenly.

"You remember my telling you about the letter, though I did not tell you what was in it?"

"I remember," said Pelham.

"It was from my father. It had no signature except *Christopher*. It offered to provide for me, and asked me to go to certain lawyers in London. Well, I didn't go. I was tempted, bitterly tempted for a few minutes, and something you said saved me. I burned the letter, and stuck to my business as an agitator. Now Sir John Warwick has been here, and he knows the facts; he spoke as if he had been under some kind of obligation to my father, but he would not tell me who he was. Now, in a way, it matters very little; but I can't help feeling as if it was a thing I had a right to know."

He looked up for his friend's assent, and stopped short.

"Why, what is it, Pelham?" he exclaimed. "I believe you know."

"I believe I do," Pelham answered. "Agnes

picked up an envelope in the committee room that day, which must have been the one that letter came in. She knew the writing, and so did I. It was Sir John Warwick's."

Brand started, and looked at him with widening eyes.

"I did not think much about it then, but I remembered it afterwards. And I remembered, too, that his second name is Christopher. As soon as the thought was in my mind I could see in how many, many ways you are alike. There were all sorts of trifling actions that you do in the same way; you have the same eyes, the same tones of voice—why, there's your hand as it lies there. It's rougher with work, and broadened a little; but if the two were laid together, no one could tell this left hand from the fellow to Sir John's right."

Brand looked down at his own hand. "That's it then," said he. "What a fool never to have guessed! He might have told me when I asked him, not have wrapped himself up in a web of lies."

He fell into silence. Pelham was silent too. Then Brand said, "Thank you for telling me. I am glad to know," and again was silent.

After a minute or two he said, "I did not know I had any illusions left, but I must have had. I thought I was quite alone before, but I am more alone now."

"No, Brand, not alone," said Pelham warmly, and laid his hand upon that closed left hand of Brand's which still lay, a mute witness, on the table. "There are a few of us to whom you make a part, and the best part too, of our lives."

Brand made no answer, for at this point Mrs. Pelham came in.

"Mr. Brand," said she, "here are the Mudford deputation waiting to see you."

He started up.

"We have put them into the study, and given them each a morning's paper ——"

He was hurrying towards the door; she put out a delaying hand—"So that they can wait a few minutes."

"While I give an account of myself?" said Brand, trying hard for a smile. "Well, Mrs. Pelham, Sir John and I discussed the whole position of the nation, and I adopted your presentment of the case in the most unblushing manner as my own. Finally, he informed me—owing no doubt to that—that I was the most intelligent young man he ever met."

"Did he say that?" said she, gratified, and perhaps a little surprised.

"And the most impracticable," added Brand. She laughed and said: "And now, there's this deputation."

"You think I ought to accept?" said Brand.

"Will they stand by you, if you stand apart from the Liberals? That is the question."

"That *is* the question," assented Brand. "And I doubt whether I shall get a real answer to it from these men. I expect I shall have to go down and see."

"But you want to stand?"

"Yes, I want to stand. I am unregenerate enough to feel that there would be a satisfaction in winning an election in Mudford."

"And we'll go down and canvass for you," said Pelham. "I should think Nanny's corrupt influence must still linger among a good many working-men voters."

"And I shall live to be in the thick of a contested election after all," said his wife.

"I should not like for you to be brought into it for me," said Brand, shaking his head.

"I would not do it for you," said she, and then stopping herself, "Why how ungracious that sounds!—especially when I should be glad enough to do it for you. I mean, I would work in an election, or any way, in Mudford, or anywhere, for any man who will stand for Labour as you will."

Brand, whose usual armour of deliberate indifference had been sharply pierced by the various emotions of the morning, felt an inexpressible solace in the presence of those two friends of his. To him their faith, truth, and

honest judgment were as firm ground under the feet. They preserved him even in his saddest and most cynical moments from the total aloofness and solitude which he had pictured, and believed in, to Sir John. The longing was upon him, just now, to give passage to a carefully pent-in stream. He looked at them as they stood together and said, "I believe you would walk barefoot round England, both of you, if you thought it would help on Labour, and smile all the time."

"Well, if it could be done that way," said Mrs. Pelham, "I suppose it would have to be done, and I hope we should have the decency to put a good face on it in public, whatever we might do in private." She lifted her hand. "Hush! The deputation have begun to talk. They must have finished their papers. You won't be rude to them, will you?"

"I'll try not," Brand replied with great docility, and went away.

Mrs. Pelham turned, and looked at her husband.

"Something is the matter, Oliver," said she.

"Yes, dear," he answered. "I don't know whether I ought to tell you." And, after the manner of the happily married husband, immediately proceeded to do so.

VIII.

THERE was a lull in Mudford, after seventeen days of election turmoil. The votes were being counted in the Town Hall, and the Labour candidate sat alone, in his room at the Temperance Hotel, and meditated. The varying pictures of the past fortnight floated before him, and he laughed at them with a sort of tired scorn that included himself. He saw the Committee-room, littered with many papers, Stanford, as his agent, presiding over it in imperturbable, good-humoured gravity; the continual comings and goings and crossing of trivial questions and answers, the flaring, gaslit halls of evening meetings, and the orations at damp and dusty street corners by day—in short, all that purgatory of manifold boredom, which is the avenue of admittance to an elective assembly.

Mrs. Pelham and Miss Mayne had toiled indefatigably as canvassers, the one always reasonable, the other always enthusiastic, and both eclipsed in the eyes of the electorate, by

the material glories of ladies with carriages and footmen, soliciting on behalf of the Conservative candidate. Of that rival candidate, one Mr. Charlesworth, a dull, excellent, cautious gentleman, petrified in prejudice, and a good employer, Brand thought quite charitably, recognizing in him an honest man, and recognizing also, without any resentment, the other's inalterable conviction, that he himself was a dishonest adventurer.

The Liberals had put forward no candidate, and that vexed Brand heartily, although he knew—perhaps indeed *because* he knew—that it was this very abstention which had given him a chance of succeeding. His thoughts grew even bitterer, when they turned to the rank and file of his own supporters. To be upheld in a cause that he cherished, by a sanctionious shuffler like Wilkins, was gall and wormwood to him. The tacit antipathy, always existing, had arisen to considerable heights, owing to obvious divergences of estimate, Wilkins regarding himself as the natural guide and instructor of Brand, while Brand regarded Wilkins as an officious, ignorant, and, above all, untrustworthy intermeddler. It is to be feared that Brand was hardly so penitent as he should have been, in recollecting that he had more than once snubbed his senior

pretty severely. There was a youth called Hobson, also, a scapegrace, home on a brief holiday from sea, who had the moral and social codes of an especially feather-headed schoolboy, and who had shown on Brand's behalf a most active and discomposing zeal. And then there was the pompous local magnate, loud in professions of advanced Radicalism, the remembrance of whose florid laudations caused Brand to blush as he sat alone by his upper window in the Temperance Hotel, and to reflect with some envy upon the dignified respectability of Mr. Charlesworth's supporters.

Outside the window, everything was very quiet; the hours chimed quarter by quarter from the Town Hall tower; the swallows dipped in and out under the eaves of the house-backs opposite, and now and again came the sound of a voice from the kitchen departments of the hotel.

"If one were to give it all up; if one were to go away to a new place—away from all the struggle and wrangle—to be quiet; to live one's own life like another man." So he thought, half believing that the mood expressed his deepest will, and wondering dreamily, even as some second person might have wondered, how he came to spend his life in a bondage so ungrateful.

Then he heard a bustle and an outcry, and in an instant he was below in the market-place, making his way through knots of expectant idlers which broke apart to give him passage. The Mayor of Mudford was standing under the portico of the Town Hall, at the head of the flight of steps. The two agents were beside him; a sedate, elderly solicitor named Hawker, and Stanford. Brand looked at their two faces and felt assured.

The Mayor began to speak, and at the first motion of his lips an amazing silence fell upon the crowd—

“Fellow citizens and electors of Mudford, I have to announce to you the result of the enumeration of voting papers in the election for our Member of Parliament. The numbers are—Brand, 2783; Charlesworth, 2709. I therefore declare ——.”

His Worship's declaration, however, was heard by no man beyond the portico. The crowd became a roaring sea of vociferous faces and waving hats, speckled here and there with the thoughtful brow of some calculator striving to reckon the majority. As for Brand, he had one of those rare moments in which a man gets the thing he wants, and finds possession outdo expectation. A light seemed to rise before him out of darkness. The indifferent

mass of men, so sordid and so wearisome, a minute since, grew suddenly close and dear. The veiling husk of ceremony and process fell off and left a clear inward spirit. He felt himself chosen of these men, here and now, without intermediary forms, their souls breathed into him, making him their leader and their servant.

He found himself standing amid the little official group; someone shook hands with him; the air vibrated with his name. Down in the tumult of faces, a woman lifted up her child to look at him, and the child clapped his hands. That sight moved him so that he felt the tears rise in his throat, and was obliged to cast down his eyes. It was the old fable of the wind and the sun; against all onslaughts he had stood firm and close enfolded. This warmth melted him, and the cloak of indifference fell. He stretched out his two hands to them as he spoke—he, so chary of gesture, so fearful of the theatrical—and his voice had new, odd cadences.

“Men of Mudford, I don’t know how to thank you for this trust in me. It isn’t any mere phrase to say that this is the proudest minute of my life. Oh, it’s worth something to belong to a country where a man can be chosen in this way, honestly and deliberately, to speak for his equals. To stand here like

this is a greater thing than any kingdom a man might happen to be born to. I don't want to boast; I don't want to make promises. Standing here to-day, I feel as if I had never done enough, never believed enough; I have been so half-hearted. It seemed to me, sometimes, as if nobody cared, and as if you working men did not understand. But you do care, and you do understand, and it's so easy to go on, now. This England, this country of ours, it is in your hands; it might be a country where every child might grow up honest, and healthy, and useful, and undegraded. It *might* be—you know how far it is from being that now. That's what we have got to work for, to fight for, peaceably, by law, by organisation, by being of one mind and preaching and teaching. There has been nothing better worth fighting for since the beginning of the world—no, and no nobler way of fighting. And the victory is bound to come. I may not be there to see, but I know it will come—it must come, if working men will only understand and stick together. As for me, I may not be able to do much, I may make mistakes and fail as better men have done before me; but at least I promise you two things. No fear and no danger shall ever turn me back,

and nothing shall ever tempt me to use any means that are not worthy of the cause. I can't promise to be right; but I'll be straight."

So the oration ended—the least able perhaps, and the most moving, which Brand had ever uttered. For to the average English audience, that which appeals is not ability or reasoned argument, but personality; force, not logic; not the thought, but the man. The favourable summing up is not: "It's true," but "He's a good 'un." To argument indeed, the English mind is naturally impervious, and therefore it has an appetite for facts, and an instinct—not unwholesome—to measure by the accomplished deed. Every man in this crowd to-day believed the more in Brand, because Brand was elected of the crowd; even Mr. Charlesworth felt the upstart more respectable for having won the game; nay, even Brand himself was not free in this moment from some tincture of the same sentiment.

Till the evening, the elation lasted. His meal by-and-bye at the Temperance Hotel assumed the character of a triumph. The waiters beamed upon the party; the demure young lady, enshrined in a glass case on the first-floor landing, not only volunteered a congratulation, but added of her own initiative,

"I'm sure I'm very glad to hear it." Brand wondered that he had never noticed before what a kind and pleasant girl she was. Out in the market-place, two local minstrels kept playing, at intervals, "See the conquering hero comes." There was a constant murmur of feet and voices, a good deal of noisy drunkenness, and some letting off of fireworks.

By-and-bye Pelham and Stanford went off to the smoking room. Brand strolled out into the warm evening air, and escaping from the noisy greetings that met him at the hotel door, turned into the ill-lighted back streets. He came to one that was like a dozen others; two rows of little brick buildings with slated roofs; two windows above, one window and a door below, the boxlike outline broken by a tiny pent-house extension of scullery at the back. He stood still, in the dusk, and stared at one of these little houses. He had lived here, five years ago, with his wife. That brief episode belonged to a stage of life that was practically forgotten, but to-night the memories stirred. Success had gone home to his heart, and there was no one to share it. Pelham had his wife; Stanford had his betrothed. He stood in the darkness of the street, and gazed at the light in the lower window; a woman's shadow fell on the blind. He had come home so often

and seen a light there, and the flitting of a woman's shadow. For a moment it was not Mary but all the interval that seemed dead. For a moment the impulse was strongly on him to stop and lift the latch of the low gate, take the one step to the door, and opening it, behold the bright light, the familiar room, the delicate, anxious face. But he thought of the face as it might have been to-day, five years older, and of a child at the mother's skirts. As he stood musing upon that picture, his eye fell upon his sleeve. He realised, with a dull shock, that these were not his working clothes, that the past was dead, and that the man who stood here to-day was not Mary's husband, but the new Member of Parliament for Mudford. He walked on slowly, feeling his loss anew. He went up to the churchyard, encircling the old parish church. The gates of the side-walk were closed; he scaled one easily enough, strode down the gravelled alley and turned aside. He had had the genuine working-class ambition, and had given a decent grave to his wife and child. The moon was rising, and the little headstone shone out clear before he came up to it. The thought passed across him with a sort of surprised recognition, that he had never spoken a word of real affection

or real self-communication since the date that stood on that stone. Then he came close and saw that something was lying on the grave at the stone's foot. He stooped and looked nearer. Someone had laid here a laurel wreath, tied with the colours of the successful candidate.

IX.

BRAND and Pelham went back next morning to London, where Mrs. Pelham met them with triumphant gratulations. Stanford remained behind to be present at the verification of the tale of voting papers, and to settle various outlying accounts. He was not expected in town for a couple of days at the earliest. Late on the evening of that same Thursday, however, he was announced at the vicarage of St. Perpetua's, and following his announcement, brought into the circle of the lamplight a face of very unwonted gravity. His first words were startling. "Do you know," said he, "there has been foul play over this election?"

"What do you mean?" cried Pelham and Brand together.

"There are 108 voting papers missing."

"But how? When? Where? How is it possible?" asked Pelham.

"When they came to verify the ballot papers," said Stanford, "they found there were 108 too

few for the counterfoils. They are not all from one district, but from ever so many different ones. That means that they must have been taken after the boxes were opened—after the counting began. You know the Mayor would not go on counting all night, as Hawker and I wanted him to. So at eleven on Tuesday evening, they left off. All the papers from the different districts were mixed then—that's the first step—and the Mayor did up the papers into two parcels, and marked one *counted votes*, and the other *uncounted votes*, and he and I and Hawker all sealed them. When we came out he locked the door, and we all sealed that, and he took away the key. When we went back, yesterday morning, the seals were all right on the door, and also on the parcels. Then they went on counting—awfully slow and careful they were—and about four, as you know, they finished. The Mayor did up the papers again, and locked them up in the same way before he went to make the announcements, and we did not go to compare the counterfoils till this morning. You get in a list, you know, from every district. 'So many spoiled, so many returned, so many in the box,' and of course they ought to come right with the counterfoils. Well we soon found they did not. There were more than 100 short, and

it was clear they had not been stolen from any one ballot box. Then the paper that had wrapped up the uncounted votes on Tuesday night was looked out from the waste-paper basket, and there was no doubt about it ; it had been cut open underneath so as not to break the seals, and mended with a pasted strip. None of us had ever thought of looking at the under side of the parcel."

"Who keeps the keys of the Town Hall?" asked Brand.

"But the door was sealed, Brand, and the seals intact. No one got in at the door."

"Which room was it?" asked Pelham.

"The Mayor's private room."

"On the first floor, then ; looking into Little Market Place."

"Yes—if they call it Little Market Place—with a timber yard and a stable."

"A man could easily enough get in at that window," said Brand. "I could myself ——"

"For heaven's sake, don't go and say so," interjected his alarmed agent, and Brand laughed, but added : "There's a parapet along, and Everett's timber stacks come close up to the corner. Some boys climbed up, the day we held a meeting there. There is no difficulty there."

"We concluded that was the way of it,"

said Stanford. "But you know, my friends, this is an awkward thing to have had happen. As far as I can see, the Acts don't expressly provide for any such emergency, but if Charlesworth chooses to petition, there's no reasonable doubt that he can get the election declared invalid, and the ballot taken over again."

"So it ought to be," declared Brand.

"Hum!" said Stanford, discontentedly. "I should hope his Worship will consent to count all night next time."

"I suppose it is known in the town," said Pelham.

"Will be, to-morrow morning. The Mayor has written to both the papers. The *Courier* will say some nasty things—that's of course. The Mayor wired at once for a first-class detective; Hawker and I told him to. Straight sort of fellow, Hawker, and he was perfectly civil and friendly."

"Well, after all," said Pelham, "there's nothing to show that the lost votes were on our side."

"No—except that we have won. Well, I thought I had better come up and let Brand know."

Brand sat looking before him, with a perturbed countenance.

"I was wondering as I came up," Stanford

resumed, "whether it would not be well for you to go and interview one of the papers, but on the whole I think not. Now we feel the drawbacks of standing outside both parties. The Conservative papers will stand by Charlesworth, of course, and the Radical papers will be only too glad of the chance to throw you over. I am awfully afraid this may cost you your seat."

The light of contest began to shine in Brand's eyes, but he said nothing.

"Have they no suspicion, no trace," asked Pelham.

"Not yet, and I doubt whether there ever will be any. If anybody had seen the entrance, it would have been stopped, then and there, and of course, the papers would have been destroyed at once. There will never be any proof, and the doubt will damage Brand—it's sure to. I *can't* conceive who would be such a fool as to do it on our side, and not know that the election would not stand."

"You think they were votes for Charlesworth, then?" said Brand.

"Honestly, I do. I don't believe you can have had a majority of nearly 200."

"Then I ought to give up the seat to him."

"Now, now; don't be in such a hurry.

There *may* have been a larger majority than we thought."

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Pelham, speaking for the first time, "like the work, not of a stupid friend, but of a very clever enemy. I cannot help thinking that it has been a deliberate plan to damage you."

"If so—and you are generally right," said Brand—"the question is, how I can best meet it. No, I'll not go down to a newspaper. But I'll write to Mr. Charlesworth, and tell him I am anxious for a fresh ballot."

"You'll lose your seat."

"Can't help it, if I do. How can I keep it with this doubt upon it, after standing up there yesterday, and telling them I would be straight at all costs?"

Stanford shrugged his shoulders.

"If a man *will* be so rash—" said he; but his tone and smile of cordial liking belied the words.

"Well, I'm going back by the early train," he resumed. "I'll see Mr. Charlesworth if you like. I had got to know what line we meant to take, and now, if it's going to be the high-moral, I'll go back and wave the banner like anything."

He went back next morning, accordingly, and the household at the vicarage spent an un-

comfortable forenoon of suspense, and looked with uneasiness to the issue of the evening's papers. Brand had intended to seek a new lodging in the neighbourhood of Westminster, and had also intended to take his seat in the House of Commons ; but he abandoned both these enterprises, and sat himself down, with a stern expression of countenance, to the study of a volume of essays in Political Economy. The master of the house shut himself into his study, and did battle with his three weeks' arrears of correspondence. Here he was interrupted, about noon, by the abrupt entrance of his guest, who silently laid before him the fluttering pink leaf of a telegram. Upon it Pelham read these amazing words :

"Missing papers found your room hotel—Stanford."

He looked up, speechless with surprise, at Brand, and beheld the reflection of his own stupefaction. For a moment they gazed thus at each other ; then Brand broke into peal upon peal of vociferous laughter.

"Your room ! At the hotel !" repeated Pelham, aghast. "Then Agnes must be right. An enemy has done this," he added reflectively.

"Yes, by the way, there's that," said Brand, recovering a graver face. "Somebody must

have done it." The returning gravity gave place to a look of alert consideration. "It does look black, doesn't it?" he observed.

"Very black indeed," answered Pelham gravely.

Brand darted at him a quick look of question. Pelham shook his head with an answering smile, and Brand said lightly, "Well, I should be sorry if you thought me quite such a fool."

He stood looking out on the four trees of the vicarage garden and the factory wall beyond. "I'm sure of one thing," said he presently, "and that is, that Charlesworth has had no hand in this."

Pelham nodded his agreement.

"I suppose," proceeded Brand, "that the best thing I can do is to go down at once and look the thing up myself. When there's a suspicion of that sort set up against a man, the least he can do is not to skulk in a corner, but try and have the fight out in the open."

"I'm sure it's the best thing," said Pelham. "But I'm afraid it will be extremely unpleasant." To which Brand replied, in his most impersonal tone, "It's all in the day's work," and picked up from the writing table the month's railway guide.

At the station, a couple of hours or so later, Brand was able to procure a sheaf of evening

papers, so that his journey was beguiled by the perusal of paragraph after paragraph, all reflecting on his own character, and all calculated to do the greatest amount of injury with the least amount of positive statement. This course of study landed him at Mudford a little sick and sad, and more than a little cynical. He felt aware, as he passed down the platform, of glances curious and scrutinizing. His own countenance and bearing proclaimed a frozen indifference. At the Temperance Hotel, three men, gossiping in the entrance, fell suddenly silent, and their heads turned his way like weathercocks. The young lady in her glazed box replied to his greeting with measured frigidity, and with no smile, and this hurt him quite disproportionately. A minute later, he stood face to face with Stanford, and fancied, even in that business-like countenance, traces of the inquisitive distrust which had pursued him.

"I'm glad to see you. I thought you would come," said Stanford, gravely. And as he spoke, he thought within himself, "He takes it hard," a reflection of which the knowledge would have chagrined Brand beyond measure.

"Tell me all about it," said Brand, laying down his bundle of London papers.

Stanford narrated the brief and simple tale. The room occupied by the Labour candidate had been swept and garnished for the reception of the next comer. The chambermaid had opened a drawer of the washstand, in which she knew a clean towel to be lying. When she lifted the towel, a bundle of papers was revealed beneath it. She carried them to the landlord. He looked into the parcel, and forthwith brought it to Stanford.

"And I," said Stanford, "told him to pack them up at once, without looking at them any further, and to come with me to the Mayor."

He looked at Brand, with an air of enquiry, Brand thought, and hastened to nod approval.

"Do you know if they were all votes for Charlesworth?" he asked.

"Every one of them," answered Stanford.

Brand unclasped his hands with a little movement, as if he let something fall that had been between them.

"That's the end of my election," he remarked, with rather an excess of tranquillity.

"The votes will be taken again," said Stanford.

"But I shall not stand again," said Brand.

It was Stanford who nodded approval this time.

"I'm not sure it is the end, even so," he

began again, presently. "There may be a prosecution."

"What! have they found out anything? Do they suspect anyone?" cried Brand.

"A prosecution of you," said Stanford.

He got a flash of genuine feeling—a glimpse of amazed derision. The notion of anything so palpable and definite as this had clearly not entered Brand's mind. Then his habitual composure descended again; he felt in his pockets, brought out leisurely a match-box and a tobacco pouch, and said very calmly:

"Well I hope so. I'd rather have the thing out in public."

X.

CINDERBRIDGE, the dull metropolis of a dull county, is a city of smoke and industry, of grey skies, monotonous streets, and much drunkenness. It is a city where all municipal rule is in the hands of employers, where the younger working men become nominal socialists of a denunciatory type, and where the elder working men become listless cynics, fulfilling a mechanical mill-horse round, and finding a dull solace in pipes of coarse tobacco, and pints of adulterated ale. A common public life and common interest are aroused, as a rule, only by the races, a big fire, or a murder; but to this rule there is one historic exception—the trial of Christopher Brand, on a charge of stealing ballot papers at the Mudford election.

On the dull November morning, when the trial was expected to come on, Brand sat in a lodging close to the Sessions House, and tried hard to give his whole attention to writing letters; but the letters progressed slowly, and

his ear was on the stretch for Stanford's step. Stanford was sitting in court, ready to summon his principal, so soon as the case under hearing should approach its end. The morning wore on, and then the afternoon. It was nearly four o'clock when Stanford at last appeared. Sir John Warwick was with him. This was the first time that father and son had met since Brand had known of the relationship between them.

Stanford explained that the case in court was only now concluding, and that Brand's would not be opened till the morning. Sir John stood by with his usual air of smiling cordiality.

"I have ventured to look in, Mr. Brand," said he, "in the rather awkward character of the uninvited adviser."

Brand stood silent, with a pale and severe face. At that moment, there was no trace of likeness between them.

The pause threatened to become disconcerting. Sir John took up the word again.

"I don't in the least doubt your power of argument or expression, and I need not say that I have not a shadow of doubt about the unfounded nature of the charge, but there are certain pitfalls—a jury is rather a difficult body—in short, I thought that it would be

only fair to offer you a few hints that are familiar to all of us, who are accustomed to this sort of practice."

"I am much obliged to you. Won't you sit down?" said Brand.

Stanford was irritated and almost shocked at his ungrateful frigidity. He cast about for some form of words, in which he might indicate to this arrogant engineer that Sir John Warwick was a man of the greatest eminence, and that his visit was a condescension to be received with deference and humility. Naturally, however, he found no inoffensive method of offering this explanation, and continued to stand by with an air of apology and embarrassment.

Sir John sat down, and proceeded quite mellifluously :

"Your jury here is composed of tradesmen. They are sure to be full of prejudice against you; and Harley is sure to stir up all their prejudice in his speech. You must not speak to them as you would to a set of working men. You must try and realize their point of view, and show them how, from that point of view, you are really not so dangerous as they suppose. They must see you as a political candidate—that's a position they understand—not as a social reformer. If you

quote general principles to them (and there really is no occasion in a plain question of facts like this) they will be affronted. It's a thing the English lower middle-class won't stand."

Brand looked at him steadily, and weighed his sentences one by one.

"Yes," said he. "I see that; and I expect I should not have thought of it." And after a moment, he added, "You don't think there's a chance of their convicting me, do you?"

"I haven't heard the case in full," said Sir John.

Stanford made a step forward; Brand looked up at him assentingly, and he gave the whole narrative briefly and accurately.

"No body of legally trained men would convict," pronounced Sir John. "*No court of appeal would uphold a conviction.* But to say that a jury won't convict—considering what they are and what you are—is more than I can venture. I will say this, that it will be a discredit if they do convict, and that you will have no difficulty in getting the verdict reversed."

"But if they acquit me," said Brand, "it won't clear me?"

"Well, no, of course, there will be people

who will always suspect you. Nothing but clear proof against someone else will save you from that."

"What do you think yourself, Sir John? How do you suppose it was?"

A certain eagerness had replaced his first coldness. It was difficult to resist enquiring at this legal oracle, even though he distrusted the priest.

Sir John shook his head.

"I can see no reasonable explanation," said he. "But if I were defending the case I should offer the jury a choice of possible ones. There's no likely one, but there are several possible. It *may* be a case of somnambulism."

It was Brand who shook his head now.

"Or hypnotism; that's the fashionable cry of the moment. But my own firm opinion is that it is the work of some man who had made a heavy bet against your getting in. There's an immense deal of betting on elections. The odd point, of course, is that the votes were votes for the other candidate. Anyway, you should show these possibilities to the jury, and any others you can think of. Don't let it appear to them that there is no alternative explanation. And, above all, don't put on any air of public virtue to the jury. Present yourself to them

rather as a plain man of business, who has too much sense to commit so palpably unprofitable a bit of dishonesty."

Brand smiled a little, in spite of himself. He felt that his measure, too, had been taken; that this companionable and friendly voice was assailing him in the accessible point, even as he himself was bidden to assail the jury. Yet the voice made its way, and he was disarmed.

"I am very much obliged to you for the warning, Sir John," he said, and his own voice was no longer unfriendly.

Sir John stood up with a gratified smile; the interview had appeased a certain pricking of his conscience. He shook hands with both of them, begged that they would apply to him on any point where he might be useful, and so departed.

The closing of the door brought back to Brand a sudden rush of feeling. Beneath his resentful bitterness and carefully-fostered indifference, lay a tenderer vein, which would not always be silenced, and which now cried out within him for kindred, for affection, for some human creature bound to him by the deep natural ties.

He sat for a moment or two leaning his head on his hand, while the faithful Stanford

remained silent, afraid to adventure upon the thin ice of his leader's mood. To Stanford, Brand's temper was still an incalculable quantity. The bent head rose again, and revealed a woodenly impenetrable countenance.

"Have you got any matches?" he asked. "Thanks." And then as he struck a light he proceeded. "I'm afraid you must have been very much bored this afternoon."

Stanford knew that tone. It was a voice "from the edge of the lips," as the French say, and its studied indifference set up an impassable barrier. Most men would deeply have resented it. Pelham would have understood that it meant suffering; and any woman who loved him would have answered it by a caress. The good-natured Stanford neither resented nor understood; but he perceived that something had gone amiss, and prudently withdrew, reflecting within himself that the heroic temperament was sometimes difficult to live with.

In the evening, Brand put in an appearance at a Radical Club, where a lecture was being given, and where his presence entirely distracted attention from the lecturer. A debate followed in which he spoke. He was lucid, earnest, and convincing, but calm and impersonal even beyond his usual wont. Next morning, at

breakfast, he wore an aspect of cheerful freshness, and walked into court with an air of a man who enters his own office, and sits down to direct a prosperous and profitable business. There had been a rumour that Sir John Warwick was to appear for the defence. Sir John however, took his place among the spectators, and remained sitting with Mr. and Mrs. Pelham. It was then perceived that the prisoner was going to conduct his own case, which was felt to render the spectacle much more exciting.

The counsel for the prosecution rose to deliver his opening speech, wigged, gowned, and with the authority of a long reputation about him : a man, eminent, dexterous, and ruthless, a lover of rank, precedent, and order, to whom Brand's defence of his own case appeared almost in the light of a personal affront.

"Gentlemen of the jury—In considering the charge before you to-day, it becomes necessary to make a cursory examination of the whole life and character of the person against whom it is brought. I have the less hesitation in doing this, because the whole career of Mr. Christopher Brand has been obviously animated by a desire to keep himself before the public eye, and to occupy conspicuous positions. If we enquire into his parentage"—Brand and Sir John Warwick sat each rigid with lowered eyelids

and pale lips—"we find him to belong to a respectable working-class family, of which no member seems to have occupied any higher position than that of a decently-paid artisan. His relations do not appear to have concerned themselves with matters beyond their sphere, but to have been satisfied, in the good old phrase, to learn and labour truly to get their own living, and do their duty in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call them ——"

"There's a wicked misquotation," murmured Pelham to his wife.

"But for Christopher Brand, who stands here on his trial to-day, this modest, but most truly honourable and respectable course of life was not sufficient. From his earliest youth we find him aiming at supremacy, at pushing ahead of his fellows and occupying the foremost place."

A brief review followed of Brand's school career—which had been exemplary—and of his apprenticeship, "at the expiration of which he had, I am informed, gained great dexterity in his craft." All these excellent doings, it was hinted, were poisoned by certain secret designs.

"Hitherto there had been nothing to show the little world around him that this well-

conducted young artisan nourished any other ambition than the legitimate one of rising in his trade by his own exertions, doing his duty in the modest sphere where he was born, bringing up a family honestly, as his fathers had done before him, and rising perhaps to the position of foreman. Gentlemen of the jury, that would have been a laudable ambition. It would have been a laudable ambition to try and attain to something higher than this. Our commerce bears upon its rolls the names of many men who have risen from the ranks, who have, by slow and solid industry, raised themselves to the highest posts in their various callings. Christopher Brand had ability enough and energy enough to have followed in their steps. He might have looked forward to a steady advance in usefulness, in wisdom, and in wealth. He might even have looked forward—not indeed at two-and-thirty, but perhaps at two-and-fifty—to attaining as a not unnatural reward that place in Parliament which he so ardently desired. But, gentlemen, such measured steps as these, satisfying to the sober and meritorious citizen, are too slow and too inconspicuous for the agitator and the adventurer. They were too slow for the prisoner before you. How he spent the years which he next passed in London

we have no record. At the age of four-and-twenty we find him here in your town of Cinderbridge, where he remained for about two years. I can put into the box witnesses to show you that during that period he worked for seven different employers. I cannot produce evidence as to the cause of all these various dismissals, but the facts speak for themselves. He made himself conspicuous as a member of a Socialist society, since defunct, was once summoned for creating an obstruction by speaking in the streets, and was a ringleader in those demonstrations of the so-called unemployed, which excited so much and such well-founded alarm, some six years back. By this time he had chosen his career—the career of an agitator, with all its excitements, notoriety, and uncertainty.

“And now, having, as I have told you, lost four situations in a twelvemonth, Mr. Brand, like too many of his class, considered the moment propitious for marriage. Far be it from me to trench on the sacred privacies of any man’s domestic life. I must, however, call your attention to this point, because it shows so clearly that Mr. Brand, with all his abilities and energies—abilities which we must all admire, even while we deplore the direction given them—was still, in his views of life and

conduct, essentially a working man, with the mere ordinary weaknesses of the average working man. You see him before you calm, calculating, controlled, maintaining with dexterity, and not for the first time, his own defence in a court of law. But his actions, at the time of which I am now speaking, show that this young man, with all his ambition, all his 'gentlemanliness' (of which we have heard so much in certain prints) had by no means risen above the standards of the class to which he belonged; that his conduct was as impulsive, as inconsiderate, as thriftless, as that which prevails among working men in general, and produces those sufferings which Mr. Brand and his friends hope to remove by the sacrifice of the thrifty, the self-controlled, and the industrious. Mr. Brand, gentlemen, being in the insecurest of possible positions, having lost three situations in less than twelve months, and knowing—as he must have known—that he daily risked losing the fourth, married. What man in your position or in my position, gentlemen of the jury, considers that he can afford, unless he possesses a private fortune, to marry at four-and-twenty? But the working man never thinks about the matter. He marries, reckless of consequences, and so helps to aggravate those grievances of which he complains so bitterly. It is neces-

sary, gentlemen, if we are to see the real bearing of this case, that you should realise that you have before you a man who has never really risen beyond the prejudices and the moral standards of his class. From such a man we must not expect refinements of honour or even exceptional scruples of honesty. It would be unreasonable, it would be even unfair, to look for them. They do not belong to his education, to his blood, to the traditions of his class. In such a man we must expect to see break out, again and again through life, a lack of consideration and of self-control. I submit to you that it was in such an outbreak that the crime now under our examination was committed.

“It was nearly a year later, that he left this town, and made his first appearance at Mudford. Mudford, before his advent, had been tranquil; but its tranquillity did not last long. The prisoner and his friend Harris seem to have devoted themselves to fomenting discontent among their fellow-workmen. They organised a strong combination against their employers, and forced on that strike of which we all heard and read so much at the time. When the strike was composed, the agitators found it prudent to leave the scene of their operations; they came to London and soon rendered themselves con-

spicuous in connection with every kind of working-class disturbance or agitation. In May last, they were tried on a charge of conspiring to intimidate, and their acquittal was undoubtedly due to the remarkably able defence made by the present prisoner. So able was that defence, that a rumour was current in legal circles of Mr. Brand's having received assistance from one of the most distinguished members of the English Bar—a rumour which was in itself a compliment of the very highest order.

“ Very shortly after this acquittal, he resolved to contest the seat left vacant, at Mudford, by the death of the late Mr. Travis. Where the money was to come from, for this candidature, does not appear. It is, however, certain that Brand himself possessed no sufficient funds. It is also certain that the expenses incurred have been defrayed. Now this is a point of some importance, because it suggests a reason for his extreme eagerness to succeed in this contest. In this moment of fleeting popularity he did succeed in obtaining the necessary supplies; and if he could secure a seat, he might hope, by keeping himself before the public, to obtain the same support on another occasion, whereas if he should fail in this first attempt, it might be difficult to induce any person to furnish funds for a second.”

The course of the election was described in that degree of detail which a judicious advocate esteems necessary to the apprehension of the average juror, and the proceedings of the fateful Tuesday evening were narrated almost minute by minute. The circumstance that Brand had been out, from eight till nearly midnight, was dwelt on, and was brought into proximity with the fact that the voting papers were shut up in the mayor's room soon after eleven. The crookedness and darkness of Little Market Place, the easy ascent of the wall, the convenient vicinity of the timber-stack, were all made clear. And then came a sentence which recalled wandering minds, and created the first real sensation.

"I shall bring before you two witnesses, both old residents in Mudford, and both old acquaintances of the prisoner. One of these, Mr. James Mason, will tell you that, at about five minutes to twelve on that evening, he met, near the entrance to Little Market Place, a man whom he believes to have been Brand, and that this man was wearing an overcoat similar in shape and colour to one which was habitually worn by the prisoner, and which, unless I am mistaken, is the same that he has taken off since coming into court."

Everybody looked at the coat hanging on the

back of Brand's seat. Its concrete interest quite outweighed the periods of the orator, and the attention of the audience was only recalled when he came to a fresh stage.

"The second witness is Mr. Joseph Wilkins, who was one of the prisoner's most active political supporters, and naturally prejudiced in his favour. Mr. Wilkins will tell you that he actually saw Mr. Brand emerge from Little Market Place on the evening of the 15th of June, and that Brand was carrying under his arm some sort of parcel. He will also tell you that the prisoner's manner was confused, and his answers inconsecutive, so that Wilkins doubted at the time whether he had not been drinking. Now, gentlemen, Little Market Place is not a thoroughfare. It leads only to a timber-yard, and to a side door of the Town Hall. It will be for Mr. Brand either to disprove the sworn testimony of Mr. Wilkins, or to show you some reason for his being in that *coul de sac* at that hour."

He paused for a moment with the air of one who awaits an answer, and arranged his notes. Brand, however, as Stanford afterwards remarked, "never turned a hair," but continued to sit with a polite air of listening attention, and to display that power of sitting completely still, which, in a man of nervous temperament,

betokens either a good deal of social discipline, or a high degree of self-command. The opposer in an academic debate might have exhibited more of personal interest.

"You will have before you," Sir William Harley continued, "the paper in which the stolen ballot papers were enclosed, and will see for yourselves that a cut was made in the undermost portion, and a strip very neatly applied afterwards over the cut. This was not the work of a clumsy or an unskilful person. I will go so far as to say that it was emphatically the work of some person dexterous in handicraft, as is notoriously the case with a skilled working engineer. Of the ballot papers extracted, every one recorded a vote in favour of the Conservative candidate—a point to which I would call your particular attention. In all problems of this sort it is wise to enquire 'Who profits?' and if we enquire who profits by a diminution in the number of votes for Mr. Charlesworth, we find only one answer—Christopher Brand."

Brand's speech at the conclusion of the election was read aloud. His own words, uttered with so much emotion, and sounding, in this adverse voice, effusive and inflated, gave him the first real stab. He sat with his eyes cast down, fingering his pencil, and feeling

almost as a man might feel who heard his own love letters read in court.

"Gentlemen," proceeded the orator, "I will say boldly that that is not the speech of an innocent man. There is too much protestation in it. It is the speech of an uneasy man. I do not say that it is a speech incompatible with innocence, but I do affirm that an acute observer would prognosticate such a speech from a man conscious of guilt. The dishonest man, enacting honesty, seems doomed to overstep the modesty of nature. The simplicity of innocence is denied to one whose life has become a deception. The guilty man, assuming innocence, swaggers and becomes theatrical. He seeks public occasions; like Mr. Brand, he attends a public meeting on the night before his trial, and takes part in a public debate."

"Yes," said Brand to himself, "it is true. The natural thing, the thing I wanted to do, was to shrink into myself. The going to that club was not heroism, it was bluster."

Sir William now began to skate dexterously upon his thinnest stretch of ice, and to suggest to the jury approximately plausible reasons for the non-destruction of the incriminating papers. These amounted briefly to the assurance that criminals always became flurried and forgot things, and the suggestion that Brand must

have been especially liable to flurry in his election excitement. Then, coming to a firmer field, he began to point out the difficulty of supposing that any other person could have had any conceivable interest in stealing or concealing them. "This supposition involves the existence of an elaborate plot, to put upon an innocent man the appearance of a serious crime. Now, gentlemen, plots of that sort are rare. They seldom occur except in self-defence—to divert suspicion from the real culprit. But here we have to suppose a crime committed—and committed at considerable personal risk, for the express purpose of creating a suspicion. Let us consider the whole facts. Brand's eagerness to succeed is undisguised; certain papers are abstracted, whose absence does enable him to succeed; he is met coming from the scene of the theft at the time when it must, in all probability, have been committed. Finally, the papers stolen are found in the room which he had occupied. The chain is a strong one indeed—so strong that only the most conclusive proof of innocence can acquit the prisoner before you.

"The temptation, it may be noted, was of a kind to which a man of the prisoner's standing would be peculiarly liable. The half-educated man, who has not breathed all his life the

atmosphere of honourable scrupulousness, is naturally not very sensitive to the higher social honesties. Many a man who is as incapable as you or I, of stealing his neighbour's purse, will not hesitate, for instance, to defraud a railway company; and the sacredness of purity of election is a notion to which many of the less educated voters have never risen. And therefore, gentlemen, while I ask you to condemn, I ask you also to excuse; I ask you to remember that this young man's misplaced ambition had brought him into a sphere for which he was unfitted, and exposed him to temptations for which he had never been prepared. The heaviest punishment to which your verdict can consign him is but a light one, since six months' imprisonment is the highest penalty imposed by the Act. In his case, its infliction will, I venture to say, be a real benefit to himself. It will necessarily check, once and for ever, those ambitions which have turned him from a career in which he might have been honest, useful, and respected. He is young yet. Such a lesson and such an enforced space of meditation may be his salvation. He may be honest, useful, and respected yet — as a working engineer — but never as a member of the British House of Commons, to which indeed,

even if you should acquit him, no constituency would ever, after this accusation, return him."

The speaker sat down, and his hearers sighed, as people do in a theatre, at the close of an act. Brand had entirely recovered his equanimity. He had set down a note at rare intervals, but on the whole had sat quite still, with a rather provoking air of experiencing no discomfort.

XI.

THE first witness called was the Mayor of Mudford, who described the enumeration of the voting papers. It was made clear to the dullest, that unless the papers were stolen by a conspiracy, including the Mayor, the Town Clerk, a highly respectable ex-accountant, and both election agents, they must have been stolen during the night, when they were left locked up in the Town Hall. The subsequent inspection of counterfoils and absence of the papers was also detailed.

Brand only inquired whether the window of the room was shut or fastened.

The Mayor did not recollect.

Plans were put in of the Market Place, showing the Town Hall, the Temperance Hotel, Little Market Place, and the timber stack. A policeman who had been on duty testified that he had seen nothing suspicious.

"Did you see me or anyone resembling me?" asked Brand.

"No, sir."

"And did you, at that time, know me by sight?"

"Known you by sight any time these five years," said the policeman, rather grimly.

Evidence from various persons at the hotel proved that Brand had been out from eight o'clock till close on midnight, that nobody would swear whether he was or was not wearing a great-coat, and that the night was a warm one.

Stanford testified that Brand came to his room at twelve o'clock, that he was then wearing no overcoat, and carrying no parcel, and seemed in no way excited or agitated. He added that Brand had spoken of various alterations and rebuildings in a neighbouring village, to which he had walked.

Three questions closed the cross-examination of Stanford.

"You have been in pretty close and constant communication with me, both during the election, and since, haven't you?"

"Certainly."

"Have you ever known me to say anything that wasn't strictly true?"

"Never."

"Would you be willing to act as agent for me at any other election?"

"Perfectly willing."

A man of Mudford, a small tradesman, named Mason, swore that he had met in the Market Place, close to the mouth of Little Market Place, a man whom he believed to be Brand, and who was wearing an ulster such as he had seen Brand wear.

This evidence created a visible impression.

Brand, unruffled and politely attentive, began his catechising in an easy, neighbourly tone.

"Will you mind telling the jury about how long you have known me, Mr. Mason?"

"It will be a matter of four or five years, I suppose."

"And what had our relations been—friendly or otherwise?"

"Oh, quite friendly," answered Mason; and then hesitated and added a reluctant proviso, "That's to say, except once or twice, when you weren't satisfied with my goods at the shop."

This statement raised a burst of laughter, in which Brand joined.

"I had forgotten about that," said he. "Now can you tell the jury whether you ever met me in the street—not counting that Tuesday night—without speaking to me?"

Mr. Mason could not call to mind that he ever had.

"But you did not speak, on that Tuesday night?"

"No."

"Well, now, how was that?"

Mason didn't know as there was any particular reason.

"Did you mention to anybody that you thought you had met me—I mean on Wednesday or Thursday?"

"Well, no, I don't think I did. There was no reason."

"Where were you going yourself, Mr. Mason, at a little before midnight?"

"I was going home."

"And do you mind telling the jury where you had been spending the evening?"

"I'd been at a club I belong to, that meets twice a week."

"Meets where?"

"At the Green Man."

"Then we may conclude that it is not a teetotal club," said Brand.

The listeners, thankful, as listeners always are in a court of law, for even the smallest joke, tittered, whereat the judge lifted a school-masterly frown, and an official said "Hush! Hush!" with an appearance of being much shocked.

Mason replied angrily: "I wasn't drunk, if

that's what you mean. It's well known I am not a drinking man."

"But when a man belongs to a club that meets at a public-house, he generally takes a glass or two, doesn't he?" said Brand amiably. "It's expected of him. Suppose you just tell the jury exactly what you did have."

Mason did not know as he could say exactly, after all this time. It might have been two half pints of ale and two glasses of whisky and water.

"Were there a good many people about, that night?" asked Brand.

"Yes, a good many more than usual."

"What sort of a night was it—light or dark?"

"Middling-like. There was a moon, but it was cloudy."

"And was it light or dark when you met this man?"

"Rather darkish."

"Now, about this coat, which you say was like mine. What colour was it?"

"It was dark—dark brown I thought."

"Can you swear that it was not dark grey?"

"No."

"Or dark blue?"

"No."

"Or black?"

"N—no."

"What made you say it was like mine?"

"It was long, and had a cape."

"Is there anything unusual about the shape of my coat? Here it is. Look at it."

"No, not particularly."

"Have you seen other people wear coats like it?"

"Oh dear, yes."

"Do you happen to know Mr. Hawker by sight—Mr. Charlesworth's agent?"

"Oh, yes; there he sits."

"Have you ever seen Mr. Hawker in a coat of this sort?"

"Now you come to speak of it, I believe I have," replied Mason.

"Can you swear that the person you met had not grey hair?"

"I can swear that it was neither white nor light."

"But it might have been as grey as Mr. Hawker's."

Everybody looked at Mr. Hawker, a spare, grizzled, serious solicitor; and it was observed that he himself looked up at Brand with a smile of distinct amusement.

"Can you swear," resumed Brand, "that the person you met was not Mr. Hawker?"

"No, I can't swear," Mason answered

grudgingly. "But you'll never make me believe it was," he added with emphasis.

"No," said Brand, rather drily, "I daresay not. That will do, thank you, Mr. Mason."

This sally of Brand's resulted in the introduction of Mr. Hawker as the next witness. His examination consisted of but a couple of questions. No, he was not in or near Little Market Place, about midnight, on the Tuesday named. He was at home, and in bed.

Then Brand had a few questions to put.

"Mr. Hawker," said he, "will you kindly tell the jury your opinion of the way in which the election was conducted on my side—whether there have been any signs of unfairness, or willingness to take dishonest advantage?"

"Nothing of the kind at all," said Mr. Hawker. "Everything, as far as I could judge, has been perfectly honourable and open."

"Will you tell the jury what my attitude was, as to the attempts made to disturb Mr. Charlesworth's meetings?"

"You declared in public that if the disturbances were renewed you would withdraw your candidature. You also came to me privately, and offered to take any steps I wished, in the way of keeping order."

“Do you mind telling the jury what opinion you formed of me, putting aside the present charge?”

“I formed the opinion,” replied Mr. Hawker, speaking very distinctly and deliberately, “that you were a very able and scrupulously honourable man, and that you were perfectly honest in your political opinions—mistaken though they appear to me—and, I may add,” he proceeded, after an instant’s pause, “that I have seen no reason to alter that estimate.”

Brand gave him a look of very real gratitude and satisfaction.

“Thank you, Mr. Hawker,” said he. “That’s all I had to ask you.”

“That was very neatly done,” murmured Sir John Warwick to Oliver Pelham; and there was a very general feeling that Brand had led the enemy into an ambush.

The most important of all the witnesses—Wilkins—now came forward. This cautious man was pale and perceptibly ill at ease, and his demeanour showed an odd admixture of perturbation and resolution. For once, he was sparing of his words, replying briefly and with the careful slowness of a man who aims at complete precision. The first questions dealt with his political relation to Brand. His answers indicated quite a touching trust.

Brand was observed to smile. The questioner passed on to Tuesday, the 15th of June. Yes, Wilkins remembered that night well, and gave his account of it lucidly. He declared that at ten minutes to twelve, he had been crossing Market Square, on his way home from the Committee Room, where he had been helping to sort papers and to "tidy up like," when he had seen Brand emerge from Little Market Place and go hastily towards Castle Street. He had been surprised, and fancied himself mistaken—had followed up Castle Street, and halfway up, had overtaken Brand, and addressed him by name. Brand had appeared confused. Wilkins had asked where he was going, and he had answered, "Oh, I don't know—I mean—don't stop me—I'm going to the post—I must get these letters in by the midnight post." Wilkins had said, "Why didn't you go up Market Street if you were in a hurry?" for the Mudford Post-office stands at the top of Market Street. Brand must, according to this account, have actually crossed the foot of Market Street in order to reach Castle Street, which runs parallel, from the more distant corner of the Square. To which Brand had answered, "Oh, I don't think it's nearer—and Castle Street is so much emptier—one gets along faster." And then suddenly he had

demanded what Wilkins meant by dogging his footsteps, and had bidden him get out of the way, or it would be the worse for him. Wilkins had discreetly withdrawn, carrying with him an impression that the newly-elected member of Parliament was drunk.

It was Brand's turn to ask questions of this dangerous witness. He began in a perfectly smooth and courteous manner: "Will you tell us, Mr. Wilkins, what was the precise amount of your bet?"

Wilkins staggered. "My bet?" he repeated rather faintly, and with a perceptible alteration of voice and complexion.

"On the result of the election, you know?"

Wilkins did not know as he had any bets particularly, and then drawing a long breath added, more audibly, that he believed he did have two half-crown bets with neighbours.

"You are sure it was only five shillings you stood to win, if I failed?"

"If you succeeded, you mean."

"But I want to know, on your oath you know, what it was you gained by my not succeeding."

"Nothing," said Wilkins; but he was visibly uneasy, and avoided the questioner's eye.

To succeeding enquiries about the clothing, and the exact words of Brand, at the alleged

meeting, he opposed a dogged blankness. He did not know; had not taken notice; it was not light enough to be sure about a particular coat. His tone exhibited acrimony, and his occasional furtive glance was venomous. In substance, Brand gained nothing by his cross-examination, but every minute of its continuance served to deepen an impression of the witness's malignant animosity. Here and there, some listener who had before distrusted Brand began to believe in him; but the general feeling was that Wilkins's testimony tended to elucidation, and that to disbelieve it merely thickened the mystery.

Wilkins descended, flushed and testy, from the little rostrum, and his place was taken by the chambermaid at the hotel, who had discovered the stolen papers. The drawer wherein they lay was not locked, nor was the door of the room locked during Brand's tenancy. Any person could have walked in. There was a portmanteau belonging to Brand in the room. That was locked, she knew, because she had moved it when she swept the room.

Finally, an official person, who had been authorised to inspect the 108 voting papers, reported that all of them were votes in favour of Mr. Charlesworth.

The case for the prosecution was now con-

cluded. Brand stood up and said, "I do not propose to call any witnesses."

It was now well on in the afternoon of the second day, and the judge adjourned the further hearing till next day, and left the listeners to depart in the mood of the magazine reader who turns a page and sees "*To be continued*" at the end of the first paragraph.

XII.

THE autumnal sun shone quite gaily, next morning, into the dingy court room, and Brand's face showed, in the illumination, a little paler than usual. He picked up his few notes, gave one business-like glance round the court, and began to speak with that easy and well-modulated voice which is rather a rare endowment in a working man, and which came to him as his paternal inheritance.

"Gentlemen of the jury, there is only one witness whose evidence could really be of much help to my case, and I am not allowed to put him into the witness box. That witness is myself. I am the only person who can tell you, in detail, where I was, and what I did, on the evening of Tuesday, the 15th of June last. But the English law won't permit an accused person to be examined in his own case. I think, gentlemen, that in this point, the law is framed rather in the interest of accused persons who are guilty, than of accused persons who may be innocent. It seems to me a cruel hardship

that I should have to sit here, hearing a man swear falsely against me, and should be prevented from standing up to set my oath against his. I am not allowed to go into that witness box, or to offer myself for Sir William Harley to try his hand at shaking my plain statements. The whole story is very simple. I went out, that evening, at about eight. I went, first, to Alexandra Street, where I used to live; then I went to the St. Andrew's Hill Cemetery; then I went across the fields to Barring Close, and came home by the Kingsmill Road. I had on no overcoat of any kind. I never went into Little Market Place or Castle Street, and I never saw or spoke to Joseph Wilkins. It was just before midnight, when I got back to my hotel. I went straight to Mr. Stanford's room, and sat talking to him for perhaps half an hour. I brought in with me no kind of parcel, and if I had, it must have been seen both by Stanford and by the hotel porter, who was shutting up. I know nothing of the stolen voting papers, never saw them, and haven't seen one of them to this day.

"That, gentlemen, is the substance of my defence. I might spread it out into many words, but those are the facts, to which I would pledge my oath, if the law would let me, and about which I would eagerly submit

myself to the most searching questions that could be put to me.

“But I can, I hope, show you that such an act as this of which I am accused is quite out of character with all my life, and also that its committal, so far from being to my advantage, was the most damaging thing that could possibly be done to me.

“First of all, I must protest against the assumption that the class to which I belong, has a lower standard of honesty or honour than the classes that are better off. If my father and my uncles had been on the Stock Exchange or in the City, something of the kind might have been said, fairly enough. But the people among whom I was brought up, were people who lived on their own earnings, skilled artizans, as you have been told—iron workers and wood workers—and no man who really knows these classes of men will get up and say that their standard of honesty or of public spirit is lower than that of the ordinary commercial man. I may say that it is only since I have had dealings with people a good deal better off, that my eyes have been opened to the amount of dishonesty that goes on. No, if I had grown into a dishonest man, it would not have been because of my early surroundings, but in spite of them. The learned gentleman tells you that I had a

prospect, if I chose, of doing well in my trade, and becoming a foreman, and perhaps an employer. Well, that's true. I hadn't much to complain of, on my own account. An engineer, if he's a good workman and a steady man, is sure of decent pay and reasonable hours—thanks to his Union. But I saw others worse off—hundreds here in Cinderbridge—and I knew they had never had a chance and *couldn't* have a chance, while things went on in the same way. I knew that I had had advantages myself, I was better educated, and stronger, and more intelligent, and it seemed to me that all these things made it my business to try and help those who hadn't got them. Of course I ran a risk, I knew that. And then I married, and the learned gentleman says that shows I was reckless and selfish. That's a sort of thing that gentlemen and ladies are fond of saying. They don't realise that, while a business man's or a professional man's income gets larger as he gets older, a working man's gets smaller. If a man in the learned gentleman's class marries at thirty, he expects to be better off at five-and-forty or fifty, and better able to provide for his children. But a working man is best off from five-and-twenty—or even younger—to forty. If he doesn't marry till he's thirty he must look to be getting less money, just when

all his children are growing up and not old enough to help. That's one thing; and another is, that the working man's chance of life is smaller. Working people die, as a rule, ten or twelve years younger than people like yourselves, and a man who puts off marrying is likelier to die and leave his wife and children unprovided for. Gentlemen haven't these same reasons for marrying early. It would be better, to my thinking, if they had — better for themselves and for the women of my class. It's considered prudent and honourable for a gentleman not to marry young, but it's a prudence and honour that's very often dearly bought at someone else's expense. As regards my own marriage, my wife, when I married her, was working twelve to sixteen hours a day for a wealthy employer in this town, and earning three-farthings to a penny-halfpenny an hour. She had nobody belonging to her, and her health had begun to break down. It wasn't much of a prospect I had to offer her, as the learned gentleman says; but I thought I could do better for her than that, and I think I did.

“I lost my work in Cinderbridge by making myself prominent in an agitation about work for the unemployed. I had nothing to gain for myself by taking part in it, and the truth is that

there were times when I was tempted to consider my own future and keep quiet. I can assure you, gentlemen, that however the matter may appear to Sir William Harley, it did not appear to me to be either the easiest or the most profitable course which I followed. My life would have been easier and happier, and probably longer, if I could have been content to stay in the workshop. But I could not be content, while there were others suffering all round me, and I thought I saw a way to stop it. Mind, I'm not saying that all I wanted and tried to do was wise or possible. I have come to think, since, that development and not denunciation is the path of progress; and the men I worked with, here, hate me for it. But what I want you to see is that the path I took was not the easy way, for my own comfort or prosperity.

"Then I went to Mudford, and it was much the same thing there. The Wireworkers' Union could not do me any good. Neither it nor the strike ever brought me a penny, as the audited accounts exist to show. Then I went to London, and have lived there ever since. I have never received money for any services, except my wages as an engineer and payment for articles that I have written in newspapers. I was tried, as you know, with

Harris, for conspiracy. Sir William Harley has said very polite things about my speech having brought about our acquittal. With all respect to his opinion, I think it was due not so much to anything we may have said, as to our not having done anything wrong.

“In May of this year, Mr. Travis died, and some of the Mudford men asked me to become their candidate. The necessary money was provided by two gentlemen, of whom one is a Liberal and one a Conservative. A third offer was made to me at the same time, which would have given me a very advantageous opening and a footing in political life. But if I had accepted it I must have attached myself to one of the two existing political parties. Of course, that would have been vastly more to my own personal benefit, but I refused to do it, because I think no man who is really a labour man ought to join himself to either of them. But if I had accepted it, I should to-day be member of Parliament for Mudford and in receipt of a good salary. So that, if what I had really been after, all these years was success and advancement for myself, I might have had it, and no one would have reproached me but myself.

“You have heard from Mr. Hawker that I

conducted the election contest honestly and properly. Now let us come to Tuesday evening, and consider what is involved in the theory that I stole those papers. I could only get to them by going into Little Market Place, and to do that I must cross the Market Square, both going and coming, because there is only the one outlet. The papers were not left by the enumerators till after eleven o'clock. Mr. Stanford has told you that I was in his room, at the hotel, by a minute or two after twelve. Remember, it was the night of an election. The town was full of people—Market Square was still pretty crowded when I came home at midnight—and I had been speaking, day after day, at indoor meetings and outdoor meetings, and my portrait was in all the papers and all the shop windows, so that probably not one of those people did not know me by sight. If I had crossed the Square into Little Market Place, soon after eleven, and crossed it again out of Little Market Place, just before twelve, there ought to be dozens of men to swear to me. But there are only Mason and Wilkins. Mason comes home at midnight from a convivial club, sees some man in an ulster, and by the light of after recollection, when he hears that the papers have been found in my room, believes that man to have been me. He can't

swear that the man was not Mr. Hawker. Surely that is enough to do away with any pretence at recognition. If it was too dark to know me from Mr. Hawker, it was too dark to know anybody. Mason's evidence comes to this: He saw a man of my height—five feet nine, the height of scores of men in every town in England—who was wearing a coat of not at all unusual cut, to the colour of which he can't swear. Now I don't know what other people might do, but if I were going to scale a timber stack, and climb in at a window, I should not put on an ulster.

“But Mr. Wilkins has stood up before you here, and sworn that he met me, and that he saw me coming out of Little Market Place. There is no error about his statements, and he knows that there is none. They are conscious, intentional, deliberate lies. Why they are told, I cannot guess. I know that, for a long time now, I haven't liked Wilkins, and I have known that he has not liked me. I believe he bore me a spite, but a man does not risk perjury for a mere spite—at least I should think not. There must be some deeper motive, and I believe some money motive. Perhaps some of you noticed Mr. Wilkins's alarm when I put that question to him. In any case, motive or no motive, the man has perjured himself, and

I am only allowed, and barely allowed, to declare upon my mere assertion that it is a perjury. I repeat that it is a cruel injustice that I am not allowed to swear this as evidence, and to be examined upon my words.

“On Wednesday, I heard that I was elected, and I made a speech, which you have heard read. I could not myself have recollected a single word of that speech. I was very much moved, and I spoke exactly as I felt. Sir William Harley says that a man with a guilty conscience would have spoken just that way. Well, Sir William Harley has a great deal more experience than I have of the ways of guilty persons, and it’s not for me to contradict him. But perhaps I may remind you that doctors who treat special diseases are always apt to find symptoms of that disease in the healthiest people, especially when they get their living by finding them, and that the personal opinion of even the most distinguished paid advocate is not evidence.

“On Thursday, the loss of the papers was found out; of course it was found out, it was quite certain to be, and quite certain to damage me because I was the man who had won. I *must* have known that beforehand. I, and I only, was the person sure to be damaged in the long run by that theft

“Then, on Friday the papers were found in my room. Now, for me to have left them there, if I had stolen them, would show me to be nothing less than a madman. Why, that drawer might have been opened by the chambermaid every day, for anything I knew, and my own locked portmanteau standing by all the time! And since we are to speculate on my early training and my general education, let me tell you that a skilled engineer is not the sort of man to go leaving jobs half finished. If I'd stolen those papers I would have taken good care that nobody ever saw a fragment of them after. And let me tell you too, that when a man has led two or three strikes, and faced dozens of unfriendly meetings, and been had up before courts of law, he doesn't lose his head and get flustered quite as easily as the learned gentleman seems to suppose.

“You'll be inclined to say to me perhaps, ‘If you didn't put them there, who did?’ and I own that I haven't a suggestion. I can't conceive how those papers came there. I can't imagine who could have planned such an extraordinary move. But I can see very plainly that whoever it was, was someone desirous of injuring me. The fact of their being found there—where they must come to light and lose me my election—is a strong

argument in favour of my innocence, since it is clearly more unlikely that I should put them there to injure me than that someone else should. As Sir William Harley says, we must consider in these things who it is that profits. Nobody could profit by the placing of those papers in that drawer except somebody who wanted me to lose the election and be disgraced. You must remember that the hotel door stood open all day, that any person could have got into my room, and, above all, that for me to have left those papers would have been simply suicidal. In the first place, it lost me the seat for the sake of which I am supposed to have risked my neck in stealing them. Beyond that, it casts upon me a suspicion very difficult ever to disprove, and most damaging to me throughout all my future career. The learned gentleman has spoken very lightly of the penalty which the Act imposes on a candidate in a case like this. Six months' imprisonment is perhaps a short sentence, but it doesn't end there. The man's whole future in public life is destroyed, and that is not a light penalty—nor a short one. I ask you, gentlemen, in my own case, as I would in any other man's, to be very cautious indeed of imposing such a penalty as that without proof.

I know that you probably have very little sympathy with my political views; I expect that you think me rather a dangerous person, and one just as likely as not to do all sorts of unlawful acts. But I appeal to you, as an Englishman to Englishmen, to put out of your minds any prejudices of that kind, and to judge this case solely by the evidence before you. If you do that, I need have no fears as to your verdict."

There was a little buzz through the court. The feelings of the audience, on the whole, were clearly with the speaker; but Sir John Warwick murmured into Oliver's ear, "Just the wrong sort of speech for that jury."

The judge summed up in a brief and somewhat chilly speech, which left upon his hearers a general impression that every circumstance of the case admitted of at least three interpretations. The case, he said, was one in which there was no question of law. The law was absolutely plain, and the question solely one of facts. The facts were that the votes stolen were all votes for Charlesworth; that they had been stolen from the Mudford Town Hall on the evening of Tuesday, June 15th, and afterwards found in a room at the Temperance Hotel, in that town, which had been

occupied by the prisoner. The whole case turned upon where and how Brand had spent the hour from eleven to midnight on that Tuesday. Two accounts were before them, of which one was not in the nature of formal evidence, and had received no confirmation from other sources. The prisoner declared that he had walked to the village of Harring and back again, but he had not brought before them any person who could testify to having met him. That, however, was a circumstance which did not necessarily invalidate his account, the road being unfrequented and the hour late. Still it must be borne in mind that there was no confirmation, and that the statement itself had not been submitted to the test of cross-examination; on the other hand, two witnesses had been called to show that Brand had been in the vicinity of Little Market Place at or about the probable time of the theft. The first of these, James Mason, was by no means positive, and if his evidence had stood alone, it might perhaps have been the duty of the jury to disregard it as probably erroneous. But with the second witness, Wilkins, it was otherwise. About his statements there was, as the prisoner had himself pointed out, no possibility of error. These statements were either true, or else they were in the nature of deliberate perjury. If

they were true, they undoubtedly tended to incriminate the prisoner. If, on the other hand, they were false, they must form part of a singularly determined and malignant scheme for the prisoner's injury—a scheme for which no motive appeared on the surface. Still, it must be borne in mind that persons capable of conceiving and executing such a scheme would naturally be extremely careful in endeavouring to prevent the appearance of any motive. The discovery of the papers in the prisoner's room was undoubtedly a puzzling circumstance. It was conceivable that a man of subtle intelligence who knew himself guilty might even have taken the bold step of hiding these incriminating documents in his own room, with the hope that their presence there might be taken as evidence of a conspiracy against him. Examples of a similar kind had been known. Taken by itself the mere discovery of the papers proved nothing. It seemed difficult to suppose that documents so suspicious could be left behind by a guilty man. On the other hand, it also seemed difficult to understand how, by whom, or for what purpose, they could have been placed there if not by him. But all experience in courts of law showed how very frequent was the occurrence of human actions which were not to

be accounted for by any probable hypothesis. The evidence of Wilkins was on a very different footing. They must either accept that evidence or reject it. That evidence he would commend to their most careful consideration, since by it, almost alone, the charge stood or fell.

On the seriousness of the charge he need not dwell. For a candidate to tamper with the genuineness of an election was a misdemeanour happily rare—indeed a charge of precisely this character had never before arisen—and in its nature difficult of proof. It was a curious feature of the Act, that a candidate could only be sentenced to six months' imprisonment, while the agent of a candidate, if convicted of a similar offence, was liable to two years. It was, however, no doubt, true, as Mr. Brand had pointed out, that the secondary penalties, inflicted by public opinion, fell much more heavily upon a candidate, and it behoved the jury to be very careful not to impose that stigma, unless they were convinced beyond a doubt of the prisoner's guilt. As to the question of previous character, which justly had great weight in cases of this description, nothing had been brought forward which could not be used almost equally on either side. He would remind the jury that it was not upon the general character of the prisoner, but upon

his having, or not having, committed a definite act that they had to find a verdict. If they disbelieved the evidence of Wilkins, they had no alternative but to acquit the prisoner. If they believed that evidence, and took into account the nature of the votes, and the place of their finding, the case did unquestionably become a case, to say the least, of grave suspicion. A solemn little peroration upon the responsibilities and duties of a jury followed.

Then the twelve arbiters paced out, one after the other, the hum of conversation began to be heard in court, and Brand entered upon the longest hour of his life. As soon as the judge ceased speaking, and his own attention relaxed, he became aware that he felt faint and sick. It occurred to him that he was hungry; but when he went to the little room behind the court, where he had eaten on the previous days, he found himself unable to touch food. An immeasurable weariness and a distaste for all things was upon him, and with it an intolerable and feverish impatience.

It seemed to him that it would be impossible to go on living until the jury once more came forth. He did not seriously believe in the possibility of his conviction, yet for the time, fears took hold of him, and the balance of hope

and dread shook him with quickly alternating thrills. The interval dragged on and on. Pelham came to him, and Stanford. Sir John did not come; he noticed that, and silently resented it; yet if Sir John had come, he would probably have resented his coming. He had hardly a word of answer for these two faithful friends, and they on their side ground out, with effort, their phrases of spasmodic encouragement. It always seemed to Brand as if he had spent an appreciable span of life in that waiting-room. At last the end came, and they hurried back. The change in the prisoner's countenance struck every onlooker. From being calm, composed, and almost cheerful, it had passed to a state of haggard pallor—nay, it seemed to have grown literally thinner in the interval of suspense. You may see such a change sometimes in the face of a man newly returned from a severe Alpine ascent.

There was a short space of bustle and hurry, then a great stillness, and this too, though it was in fact very brief, appeared to Brand to prolong itself immeasurably. A short, formal catechism followed between judge and jury, then the word "guilty" sprang out and shut off all the world. For an instant, Brand knew how totally unprepared he had been for this.

He had the sense of having stepped suddenly over a precipice. Then everything grew cloudy ; his strength and his clear perception were being sucked out of him. His thoughts—which were all blurred and hardly to be called thoughts at all—centred on the one endeavour to stand firm and keep a good face, before all these curious eyes. He scarcely understood that a question had been put to him, and it was with a sort of dull surprise that he heard his own voice, answering quite steadily and coherently, “I can only say that I am absolutely innocent.”

The judge was speaking now. Brand wanted to listen, but the words floated away before he could connect one with another. There was a moment when he seemed to be back in his childhood, making drowsily conscientious efforts to pay attention to a sermon on a Sunday afternoon. Then again, he seemed to be once more in that dusty, strike-committee-room at the Mudford Arms. He perceived, all at once, that Nature was proposing that he should faint, and his will sprang up resolute in the determination that Nature should not have her way. He drew a deep breath, set his teeth, blinked a little, and commanded the walls of the court to leave off rocking, and stand still in their places. He carried his point, and suc

ceeded in walking pretty steadily down the steps that led from the court-room. It is true that the steps appeared to waver a good deal, and that his own gait had the effort and elaboration of a drunken man who strives to seem sober. The air of the waiting-room was fresher; he sat down in a chair, and the outer world began to settle into solidity again. He began to be conscious of the blow that had befallen him, and a bitter sense of wrong and injury arose within him. Stanford came to him with a face so pale, disturbed, and full of indignation, that he looked like some much more emotional brother of the imperturbable man of business whom Brand had always known.

"Of course you'll appeal," said Stanford. "It is a disgraceful verdict—most disgraceful. Warwick says, of course you will appeal."

The sight of his agitation cooled Brand's own. A little smile touched the corners of his mouth, though he could hardly have explained, even to himself, why the mention of Sir John struck him so ironically humorous.

"No," he answered slowly, "I shan't appeal. What's the use?"

"The use!" echoed Stanford. "Why, don't you want the verdict reversed?"

"No," said Brand. "I want the suspicion

removed ; short of that, I would as soon be in prison as out of it."

His face changed a little. Pelham and his wife had come in, and Mrs. Pelham's look of grief dealt him a sudden stab. They came up to him, and Pelham took his hand in silence.

"You mustn't take it to heart so," said Brand, looking up anxiously into Mrs. Pelham's face.

"It's so cruel, so unjust," she said tremulously, and her eyes were filled with tears.

"It's unjust, of course," said Brand ; "but it's not fatal, and you mustn't think I am going to be beaten by it. I'm coming through, and I'm going to fight on."

The ghastly contrast between his words and his colourless face, with the dark-ringed eyes, was happily imperceptible to himself.

They looked at him with dismay, but in silence, and he, anxious as usual to ward off the outward manifestation of sympathy—for which nevertheless he secretly yearned—hastened to speak again.

"They have hurt me badly, this time—I don't deny it, and I shall have to get used to going about more or less disabled. You know, on the whole, it's just as well I'm to have six months out of sight to prepare for it."

Pelham, conscious of the deliberate check, and willing to give his friend whatever form of companionship was most congenial to his mood, constrained himself to answer in the same tone.

“Let us rejoice then,” said he, “that a candidate is let off so easily. If it were Stanford, I suppose he would have got two years.”

“And he would not have liked it a bit,” said Brand. “As for me, you know, as Sir William Harley says, I’m not used to the ultra refinements of your gentlemanly life. Six months won’t hurt me. It’s all in the day’s work.”

XIII.

BRAND'S resignation to his imprisonment had been no mere bit of bravado. It was with a genuine feeling of relief that he contemplated his removal from ordinary human intercourse. The doubt and suspicion resting on him, through all these months, had so fretted his natural sensitiveness that contact with his fellow-creatures became agonising. He dreaded the eye that questioned, he dreaded almost more the eye that pitied. To be away, out of sight and alone, that was the one instinctive longing—to which pride, if he had been at liberty, would assuredly have forbidden him to yield. Thus he went to his prison much as a sick man, when he resigns the struggle against his weakness, takes to his bed, too tired and full of pain to care for anything but rest and solitude. But rest and solitude are the fields of the honest man's hardest battles, and it was not peace but conflict that lay before him in his prison.

The first week or two, indeed, went by in a sort of mental torpor, which had its own comforts, but through which he was dimly aware of acute pain, lying in wait to seize him when he should emerge; and by-and-bye, when the torpor lifted, he found himself face to face with bitter reflections from which his inactivity left him no chance of turning away. For many years now, his life had been full of action, and his moments of pause and examination few. Now, he was compelled to sit still and consider, and he perceived that he had failed.

"I gave up everything I had, to try and help my fellows—pleasures, intelligence, strength—I spared nothing. I never considered a danger to myself, nor an advantage to myself. I was single-minded, if ever man was. And I have done no good—none; and met with no response."

These were his meditations in the retreat of his prison. He could not reckon up five persons to whom his imprisonment was a real grief, and not three in whose lives his death would leave a real void. On the other hand, the persons who were glad of his incarceration, and to whom the news of his death would come as a relief, were beyond enumeration.

"I'm on the wrong side," he said to himself.

"It's not a world that a man can run straight in as an agitator."

Day by day, as he brooded upon it, the world seemed more and more hostile, and his own personality more powerless.

"It was always a hard fight, but when I was in the thick, there never seemed any time for thinking how it would turn out. One only had to fight, and to believe in what one was fighting for. But now ——"

Now, contemplating the struggle from without, he saw it hopeless, and the spring of action died in him. How could he ever come out and take his part any more?

"I shall come out, of course, and I shall go on fighting, out of sheer hate and rebellion. I see that, well enough, but there will be no faith or hope in it. The only thing will be to think that there's an end of it all at last. I used to hate to think that."

An implacable sense of injury and a bitter scorn of mankind grew up in him; he cherished them, and smiled at his own previous blindness.

"One must never expect truth or bravery or affection from other people. When you let people come close, they always hurt you. The only thing is to shut them out—to be alone and go one's way. It has been so always. Men

have always hated any man who worked for all of them instead of for a few. The mistake was in looking for anything different.

“How mean it all is, and how strong! My life, with all that was in me—so much hope and power and courage—what does it all come to? A mere bubble on the top of a wave; one drop in the weight of water that turns the mill. Those are the wisest, who look out to make things comfortable for themselves. Wisest? Why it is just those who do that, who make such a hell of the world for the others. If they all tried to live the way I have tried, there would not be any real misery in the world. But they are thousands, and I am one. I shall never be able to move the weight of all of them. I shall die trying, and when I am gone, there will come another to see clear and suffer, and die the same way.”

Gradually, these gloomy thoughts settled into a black depression, which was no doubt aggravated by the effects of prison diet. Brand had all his life had the wholesome hunger of a man energetic both in mind and body, and his present fare was not of a kind to maintain his energies at their normal level. He began to have aches and pains, to be chilly and slow of thought. Then he caught a heavy cold, and for ten days was in the infirmary with a kind of

low fever. Convalescence brought with it an intolerable thirst for freedom. His views of the world and of his fellow men had not at all relented; the desire that possessed him was not for companionship, but for the outer air, for blue skies and green fields. As a matter of fact, the skies outside were not blue, nor the fields green, for it was now about Christmas-time. For perhaps a week, he never slept without dreaming that he was in the open country, and never waked without a pang of sick disappointment. It is the defect of imprisonment, as indeed of most sorts of punishment, that it weighs so differently upon different temperaments. Brand was of them on whom the weight goes on increasing.

There came a night when he lay awake in his cell, and heard the bells at midnight announcing the New Year.

He remembered his own stoical declaration, "Six months won't hurt me," and smiled a little in the darkness. Six weeks only had gone by, and already the longing for liberty had become a passion. He thought that he had never known a personal feeling so overmastering.

"I suppose that's how a man craves for drink," he thought, and at the thought, a sudden wave of pity ran through him. Hitherto,

though he had always maintained that the drunkard was less to be blamed than the drunkard's social surroundings, he had felt no sort of warmth in his heart towards those weaker brethren whom the swing-door of the public-house draws like a magnet. He had himself always been a teetotaller, not so much from any abstract faith in the virtue of total abstinence, as from a proud resolve never to give any man a pretext for throwing at him the easy accusation of being drunk.

Those other men, who yielded where he stood firm, had always seemed to him of another race. He made excuse for them, would have toiled for them, and borne with them—perhaps have been willing to die for them—but never in his life had he felt such a man akin to himself. To-night for the first time, he felt a kindred, and his heart swelled with an eager desire to help, to save, to be serviceable. The whole temptation and struggle of a man caught in that net rushed before him, not now like a picture beheld, but like a piece of his own life. He began to breathe hard, and suddenly his face was wet with tears. He had forgotten himself and his prison, and the wrongs that men had done him.

Next morning, when he awoke, it was no

longer to the stony weight of hopelessness but to something gentler and kindlier. The woes of the drunkard did not indeed occupy his mind, but neither did the failings of mankind. His mind, indeed, tired with his sleepless hours, scarcely held any clear thoughts at all. The time passed over him dreamily, and he had even a vague feeling of comfort.

Some three days later, he found his brain busying itself once more with his memories. Once more, the past, with all the wrongs and injustices and ingratitude, came under review. None of these things had changed, yet Brand, as he contemplated them, no longer felt so bitter a resentment. He scarcely understood what the alteration of view was, nor whence it came. It was not yet comprehension—which is the forerunner of forgiveness; nor was it the cynical resignation of which the sensitive learn to make an armour against the recurring stabs of disappointed expectation. The mood, for it was as yet rather a mood than a train of thought, persisted for some days, but with sharp intervening pangs, in which the old despair and bitterness rushed back on him. At last, by imperceptible degrees, his own part in those past days began to change its aspect

too, and the hour came when he perceived this change.

He had murmured to himself a stinging reflection, which tried his pride more often and more deeply than he would have been willing to confess. This was the reflection that, no doubt, his fellows said of him, "If everybody behaves ill to him, there must be some cause in himself."

A lightning flash went across his mind and he said aloud—for he had caught the prison trick already of talking to himself—"And perhaps they are right."

Other men were beloved and trusted—men who had done less and dared less than he. Harris had won affection and confidence from whole groups of men who doubted and mistrusted himself, and yet he knew well that Harris, though a brave man and an honest, was neither as able, as resolute, nor as uncompromising as he.

"And that's why. He is not so clear-sighted nor so dangerous. It is not worth anybody's while to stir up enmity against him."

"Yes, it's true," he reiterated, as the other self began to whisper doubts.

"It is true; but is it all?" the other self whispered. Then for a time Brand sat uttering no sound, and his past unrolled

itself before him, like a message in cipher of which he had suddenly found the key.

He had toiled for men, but he had not loved them ; he had given them his life, his joys, his intelligence, his youth, but he had never given them himself. For the woes and wrongs of humanity he had felt a passionate pity which had shaped his whole existence, but he had never put his arm within the arm of any ordinary man in the crowd and said, "Jack, I feel so tired, so out of heart, but I know we must win by-and-by." To be entirely aloof, entirely unmoved, entirely just, that had been his ideal of human relation for himself. His head sank down upon his hands, and he murmured, "I gave them everything, except the only thing worth giving."

A wonderful peace descended upon him. To a generous man, there must always be comfort in perceiving a fault to lie with himself instead of others. The world was no longer out of joint for Brand, nor he himself an Ishmaelite of virtue. The weaknesses and follies and meannesses of his fellow men were no longer remote and repellent but near and pardonable, things that he understood and longed to help, like the pitiable craving of the drunkard.

Sir John Warwick came into his mind. He had been so angry and so contemptuous at the

shifts and evasions; had felt so bitterly Sir John's unwillingness to be known to him; but now he saw the whole position from Sir John's point of view, and he was angry no longer. He saw by how many links—not all ignoble—the man was held to his place and his name and his party; he remembered Lady Warwick, with her sweet face like an elder copy of Mrs. Pelham's. And all at once he understood—what he had never dreamed before—that it was Sir John who had suffered most in their long interview. He determined eagerly that he would seek occasions of meeting Sir John, and would be open and frank and friendly with him. The desire to compel recognition from him, existing side by side with an implacable resolve never to accept it, had vanished for ever.

He sat there in the prison stillness, and for the first time in his life knew the depths of self-humiliation. He had been wrong from the beginning, wrong always, and his error had made him well-nigh useless in the work to which he had given his life. His very self-devotion had an element of wilful isolation; a man with natural human ties could have done more. Pelham with his child on his knee, ready to set her down and run out to any ailing old woman in the parish, was on a truer track. But now he

understood, he saw, and his work in the world opened out in hope before him once more. And as his comprehension widened, he grew compassionate, even towards himself, and his humiliation ceased to have any bitterness. Sitting in the unjust prison, to which some man's deliberate fraud had condemned him, he felt himself at peace for the first time with the world, and knew for the first time a fundamental happiness.

XIV.

LATE on a February afternoon, Brand was surprised by the appearance of an unknown functionary, who told him that the Governor had sent for him. He was led through many corridors to a carpeted office, in which a bright fire was burning. A grave old gentleman with gold spectacles sat at a desk. Beyond the ring of lamp-light, and hardly distinguishable at first, stood another man. Brand's heart gave a great leap, for the man was Pelham, and at the first perusal of his face he knew what was coming.

"Mr. Brand," said the Governor, "I have the pleasure of informing you that I have this afternoon received from the Home Secretary a free pardon for you."

As he said it, Brand's hand was in the warm grasp of his friend's. He stood quite silent for a minute, and the unwonted colour rose in his face.

"And may I go now, to-night?" he asked.

"You will want to take time enough to

change your clothes," said the Governor, smiling a little, but moved—he, too.

There was another brief silence, in which Pelham stood devouring the prisoner with his eyes, and grieved to the heart to see him so perceptibly thinner.

"But what is it, that has happened?" Brand asked. "Has anybody appealed?"

"No," replied the Governor. "Somebody has confessed."

Brand drew a quick breath. It seemed to him as if the sun had suddenly begun to shine.

"A young man called Hobson," the Governor continued, "presented himself to the English Consul at Yokohama, and stated that he had stolen those voting papers, at the instigation of another person, to whom he had handed them."

"And the other person, of course, was Wilkins," added Pelham.

"Ah!" said Brand. He felt now that the tale was true.

The Governor proceeded: "At first there was a good deal of doubt about the story. It was thought that it might be a mere trick of the young fellow to leave his ship and get taken back to England. Nothing was allowed to be published about it. On enquiry the

Consul inclined to think it was true, and Hobson was sent home and examined. The man Wilkins at first stoutly denied the charge, but at last confessed, and alleged that he was tempted by a large bet, which had been made with him on the result of the election."

"By Bayne of the wireworking company," interpolated Pelham.

"Hobson declares that he acted in the full belief that he was ensuring your election ; and when, many weeks afterwards, he learned where the papers had been found, he was afraid to come forward and confess, and if you had been acquitted, he should never have done so."

Brand reflected with terror how narrowly he had escaped a life-long burden.

"A certain amount of time was consumed in these investigations," the Governor continued. "I have been aware for fully a fortnight that your release was highly probable, and for the last three days, Mr. Pelham has been staying in the immediate neighbourhood, waiting for the pardon to arrive, but I considered that it would be a false kindness to arouse your hopes, although perhaps it seems a little hard that you should be the last man in England to learn that your innocence was established."

"After all," said Brand politely, "I was

the one man to whom it never needed establishing."

The Governor looked at him over his gold spectacles, a little staggered by his self-possession, and it crossed his experienced mind that a man of this temper was likely to be a serious force whether for good or for evil.

"I hope you will allow me in conclusion, Mr. Brand," said he, "to express my congratulations on this happy discovery, and my sympathy for the distress and suffering to which you have so undeservedly been put. I think, when you come to see the manner in which the press on both sides has spoken of you and of your misfortune, you will feel that it affords you some compensation. And if a Parliamentary vacancy were to occur to-morrow, I doubt if there is any constituency in the country which would not return you at the head of the poll."

He gave a few directions to the subordinate who had ushered Brand in, and held out his hand to the convict, whom the lucid English law pardoned for the crime which he had never committed.

Brand, after showing himself so admirably collected in the moment of crisis, began now to be overtaken by the waves of surprise and

emotion. His reply to the Governor's civilities was of the vaguest, and he followed his guide out of the room mechanically, without any clear notion of his own proceedings or destination.

He owned, afterwards, that his first recognition of the joys of freedom came to him with the spectacle of a cold sirloin of beef, displayed with the civilised adjuncts of plate, knife, and fork, upon the Governor's dining-table. But even this substantial object had a halo of dreamland about it, and when presently the dream lifted, he found himself sitting face to face with Pelham in a flying railway carriage, and remembering vaguely a great crowd of people in the station, of whom someone had said that they had been waiting for hours on the chance of his coming. They had all shouted and cheered and poured out good wishes. Clearly they rejoiced at his release. By-and-bye, he would have time to wonder at their universal friendliness. But now he only saw his friend, looking at him with a face of radiant happiness.

"How glad I am! Oh, how glad I am!" cried Pelham. "You don't know how we have missed you, Brand. I don't believe you have been out of our minds for an hour."

And Brand could not answer, for he knew that his own thoughts had been less faithful.

"And I despaired and complained," he thought, "while this affection belonged to me!"

Presently Pelham spoke with indignation and compassion of his imprisonment.

"No, no," cried Brand, "don't say anything against it. It has been the best thing that ever happened to me. I never had time to think or to look at myself before. Every man ought to spend a month in prison, now and again."

Pelham stared at him, in the first moment, with amaze; then he saw in the familiar face something which he had never seen there before, something like the change in a brook when the ice thaws. He asked no question, and, neither then nor later, did any further word pass between them. But the need of words in human relations is a sign of incomplete comprehension, and perhaps the confidence which Pelham received was not less true and full for not being bound in the limits of speech.

"It is a wonderful opportunity that you have got now," said Pelham, by-and-bye. "There's something generous about this clumsy British public after all. There's not a paper on either side that hasn't written with good feeling about this. There's hardly a

man anywhere, even among those who have cause to fear you, who doesn't seem to feel a satisfaction in your being cleared. Somehow it gives us all a better hope and courage to find a conspicuous man honest, and everybody feels grateful to you, though they don't know why. Like most of our feelings, it is more logical than it looks."

"And have the papers really taken it like that?" said Brand.

"At this moment," said Pelham, "everybody feels a sort of affection towards you. That means that, at this moment, you have the chance—which comes so seldom to any of us—of showing the best of yourself and yet being understood."

Brand sat silent, beholding the world open before him like a landscape under the rising sun.

"I have never tried to show the best yet," he thought. "I have been a coward, afraid of the hurts that might be given to me."

It was past eleven when the train drew into London, and here again a throng was waiting at the gates in the misty February night, and a cry rose up to greet the engine lights. On the platform itself, were congregated many more porters than were needed by the few arrivals. Among these unfamiliar faces—all

made alike by a common smile of welcome—rose another face, dear as a home tune heard abroad, and this too wore the same look, but deepened and transfigured.

“There she is!” cried the two men together.

“And there’s Dick!” added Brand.

What a shout went up from the crowd, as the four came down the platform. The three heard it with a throb of exultant triumph, but the one was humbled and melted to the heart.

“If I may only live to deserve it,” he thought. “If I may only have time to make up for my mistakes.”

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